

AUGUST 25, 2008

The American Conservative

THE ANTHRAX FILES

Is the truth still out there?



09-11-01
THIS IS NEXT
TAKE PENACILIN Now
DEATH TO AMERICA
DEATH TO ISRAEL
ALLAH IS GREAT

CRIME SCENE DO NOT CROSS

VALUE MEALS

Thank you for John Schwenkler's article about the inherent conservative values in the local-food movement taking root in these United States ("Food for Thought," June 30). I appreciated several things about it: First, he does not rely excessively on Wendell Berry—of whom I am a great admirer—as so many local-food proponents do. Second, he deals concisely and gently with Bill McKibben's tendency to promote an unproven, too rosy picture of "sustainable (insert appropriate life task here)." And finally, he implicitly challenges the strained argument I often hear conservatives make: that we must resist the local-food movement because industrial agriculture feeds the world. The truth is that it malnourishes the world, plays into the hands of too-powerful governments, and further increases our dependency on oil.

He should have gone further and explained that not only is his CSA share less expensive and of higher quality than the same items from his grocer, but that his \$24.50 reflects the real cost—plus a profit to the farmer—of getting that food to him and his family, something the industrialized, centralized food system simply does not account for, thanks to the externalization of such costs as water pollution and underpaid laborers.

JASON BURGETT

Burlington, Vt.

FEED THE GOVERNMENT

Interesting article for this urban Democrat and Slow Food member. I couldn't agree more that sustainable agriculture should be a conservative cause, but that kind of conservatism vanished a long time ago.

The problem for today's conservatives is that the market will always favor cheap solutions, and cheap solutions tend to be dirty and large. So for the local-food movement to grow and return our culture to erstwhile conservative values of family, land, and neighborhood, there needs to be an activist gov-

ernment squarely facing off against hog lagoons, feedlots, and other agribusiness abuses, so necessary to profits and so deadly to neighbors. And that part is not conservative-friendly.

PETER BASCH

Via e-mail

SMALL SHOPS PROFIT US

Concluding his fine commentary, John Schwenkler notes, "This [food localization] is a conservative cause if ever there was one." I'll add that the conservative argument for localizing our eating applies to localizing our other commercial choices as well.

Doing business with our neighbors builds trust and community cohesiveness and usually supports businesses with operating hours that allow employees to engage in a healthy family life. Each dollar spent at a chain store is a vote for anonymous commercial transactions in lieu of building relationships and weakens local self-reliance in favor of centralizing power in distant corporations with little accountability to the communities in which they operate.

Food localization is one piece of a broad rapidly accelerating movement that includes "buy local" campaigns and policy initiatives to halt corporate subsidies and close tax loopholes. In the past few years, nearly 50 communities of widely varied size and character have launched Independent Business Alliances that publicize the benefits of doing business locally and unite local entrepreneurs to compete successfully.

Publicly traded corporations are amoral institutions by design, mandated to pursue maximization of profit at the expense of all else. If we wish to change our hyper-commercial culture of consumption and related societal problems, supporting locally owned business is essential.

JEFF MILCHEN

Cofounder,

American Independent Business Alliance

Bozeman, Mont.

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

In your symposium "How Good Was the Good War?" (July 14), Stuart Reid is right to suggest that the Vietnam War ought to be considered "another success of the military-industrial complex." The current Iraq War is another such success. Each time the American voters were deliberately frightened by false claims that their security was at stake, and each time a hugely profitable enterprise was put into motion and sustained for years.

A unified Vietnam posed no threat to the national interests of the United States. Anticommunist hysteria caused the American public to be deceived into believing that fighting the insurgents in the rice paddies of Southeast Asia was necessary to avoid having to fight in North America. A similar climate was generated by Norman Podhoretz and his followers, so that millions of Americans thought their own security was at risk because Saddam Hussein had some inaccurate Scud missiles that could be fired at Tel Aviv.

JAMES CANNING

Seattle, Wash.

A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

Thank you so much for your excellent collection of articles examining the necessity of America's involvement in World War II. Unfortunately, this is one of many sanctified notions that our intelligentsia rarely questions.

Violence is always a failure of human imagination, and war is the ugliest and stupidest thing that human beings do. I realize that life often forces us to choose between varieties of failure, so I cannot accept absolute pacifism. But any leader who would send our young men and women off to kill and die better have an extremely compelling justification, and anyone who cheers at the beginning of a war is the damndest sort of fool.

"Glory, glory, hallelujah" is a bizarre response to carnage.

RICHARD W. BRAY

San Dimas, Calif.



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[WAR]

WE ARE NOT GEORGIANS

It should be said in George W. Bush's defense that he prefers to kid around with the women on the U.S. beach volleyball team and lead cheers for Michael Phelps than make belligerent statements about events in Russia's backyard. Not so his would-be successor, John McCain. In the days following Russia's incursion into Georgia, the Arizona senator made it clear that he's loaded for bear and just itching for a military confrontation in which to demonstrate again what a tough and angry man he is.

"We are all Georgians," McCain said while campaigning in Pennsylvania. No, Senator, we're not.

This outburst seems to have been building for a long time in McCain, who transparently yearns to restart a Cold War with Russia, in addition to bomb, bomb, bombing Iran. Is there any country he doesn't want to antagonize? He thinks it clever to insult Prime Minister Vladimir Putin by referring to his former KGB ties and has chosen as a top foreign-policy adviser Randy Scheunemann—who not long ago was a paid agent of Georgia pushing the brilliant idea of getting the little country admitted into NATO. (If he had succeeded, we might now be at war with Moscow.)

Obama, too, has condemned the Russian campaign, but you get the sense that there is some perspective in his denunciation—some recognition that Georgia has been acting provocatively and that the West pushed too hard in the matter of Kosovo independence, where it had no serious interests and Russia did. He shows some understanding that Georgia's tinpot democracy—much less its control of Ossetia—is not a factor Americans want determining the temperature of their relations with Russia.

There are bigger issues at stake. If even Bush can realize that, perhaps McCain will come to his senses.



[SCANDAL]

ENQUIRING MINDS

Ann Coulter was wrong about John Edwards. The suspiciously well-manicured presidential wannabe has the normal sex drive of an unscrupulous Southern politician—like Bill Clinton or David Vitter, not Larry Craig.

But the woman with whom Edwards broke his marital vows is no mere Monica. Rielle Hunter played partygirl muse to Jay McInerney and Bret Easton Ellis in the '80s, when she was known as Lisa Jo Druck. McInerney, "intrigued and appalled" by her lifestyle, cast the adventurous blond as the central character in his '88 novel *Story of My Life*. Ellis awarded her bit parts in *Glamourama* and *American Psycho*. Perhaps the boyish Edwards has a penchant for Gen X fiction.

As scandal, the Edwards affair is a hat trick—prurient, literary, political. It might even have changed the course of history, if you believe former Hillary Clinton communications director Howard Wolfson. He told ABC News, "I believe we would have won Iowa, and Clinton today would therefore have been the nominee," if only the Obama-besotted media had broken the story sooner. Rumors of Edwards's extracurricular activities were rife during the campaign. Should the press have pried?

Yes, they should have investigated Edwards—and Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and John McCain, too. But before scrutinizing private misdeeds, our brethren in big media ought to turn a critical eye to our leaders' foreign-policy fantasies and domestic power lust. If the *New York Times* or *Washington Post* had cared half as much about the truth behind President Bush's Niger uranium claims as the *National Enquirer* cared about John Edwards's sex life, America might have stayed out of a war.

[IRAQ]

WE'LL HELP YOU PACK

Who decides how long American troops must remain in Iraq? Last year at a Rose Garden press conference, President Bush promised to let the Iraqi people make the call: "If they were to say, 'Leave,' we would leave."

That's exactly what they have said, with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki—democratically elected, as everybody knows—telling the U.S. to set a timetable for withdrawal.

Iraq's national security adviser, Mowaffak al-Rubaie, recently told media outlets that his government is "impatiently waiting" for the complete withdrawal of foreign troops. Iraqis submitted a proposal calling for an exit within

12 months. When the Bush administration balked, Iraqis offered 16 months, in line with Barack Obama's plan.

While these negotiations continue, Bush has told Americans, "We're at war, and now is not the time to give up." His aspiring successor, John McCain, goes further, declaring that anyone who wants a firm withdrawal date is for "losing in Iraq." What about Maliki? "Prime Minister Malki, is, has got his, he is a leader of a country," McCain stutted before reverting to talking points: "I am convinced, as I have said before, we can withdraw and withdraw with honor, not according to a set timetable. And I'm confident that is what Prime Minister Maliki is talking about." So much for listening to the Iraqis.

Perhaps Maliki and a future President McCain can compromise between 16 months and 100 years. Or maybe not, since al-Rubaie insists, "There should not be any permanent bases in Iraq unless these bases are under Iraqi control." The Iraqis don't want us there, and the American public doesn't want us in Iraq either. But McBush has other ideas.

[WORLD]

GOLD STANDARD

Team USA's basketball stars may have easily defeated the Chinese, but the opening few days of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games suggest that America's sporting superiority—like its geopolitical predominance—is under threat from the dragon.

After the first weekend's events, China had won nearly three times as many gold medals as the United States. As *TAC* went to press, the hosts remained top of the medal table, though America's athletes were closing the gap.

For the fiercely nationalistic Chinese, these Games represent an opportunity to prove to the world that the future belongs to them. As sports minister Liu Peng put it, "This is a historical chance for us ... we are burdened with a glori-

ous mission." Anyone who saw the breathtaking opening ceremony—witnessed by four billion people worldwide—was left in no doubt: China the superpower has arrived.

Americans can take comfort that the Olympics are just meant to be fun. But only two days after the Games began, the Global Institute, an American consulting firm, reported that next year China will surpass America as the world's largest producer of manufactured goods—four years earlier than expected. Even if China's athletes fall short in the Games, their country continues to grow faster, higher, stronger.

[ECONOMY]

BUCKING THE TREND

After months of spelunking, the dollar rallied Aug. 8 to its highest point since February. Not surprisingly, gas prices dipped a little, too—our enfeebled currency and the sky-high price of oil are as intimately linked as John Edwards and Rielle Hunter. The greenback is still the world's reserve currency, and a barrel is still denominated in dollars.

But don't pop the Dom Perignon just yet. The dollar's upswing was really more of a downturn for the euro and other peoples' moneys. "This is payback time for the European currencies against the dollar," currency strategist Ashraf Laidi told the Associated Press, "These currencies have to retreat to better reflect the sharp deterioration in economic fundamentals in the (euro zone) region. This is not to say there's been an improvement in U.S. fundamentals." We're not doing any better—everyone else is just doing a little worse.

So long as the federal government spends incontinently—on war and war toys, above all—the dollar will remain weak. Reining in spending, and the Federal Reserve's printing presses, is the only long-term answer to the high cost of living. ■

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The Anthrax Files

The FBI claims to have caught the killer. But so much evidence has been neglected or mishandled that many experts still have doubts.

By Christopher Ketcham

SEVEN YEARS AFTER the anthrax attacks shut down Congress, sowed panic nationwide, killed five, sickened 17, and allowed neocon propagandists to variously blame al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein, the FBI claims to have gotten its man. But the official story doesn't fully accord with the facts. Any reasonable assessment of the evidence suggests that the same powerful interests that might have been served by prolonging the investigation would have had a stake in finally bringing it to a tidy conclusion. That doesn't mean that the killer was caught.

The acknowledged certainty is that the anthrax letters weren't the work of Islamists or Iraqis. The attacks were perpetrated by someone with high-level access to U.S. government supplies of the deadly bacteria. Ground zero of the investigation has long been the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID) at Fort Detrick, Maryland. But the lab had dropped from the headlines until recently, much as the FBI had seemingly allowed its investigation to languish.

The first week of August, the popular press got back in the game, reporting the apparent suicide of USAMRIID scientist Bruce E. Ivins, alleged to be the sole operator behind the anthrax let-

ters. The Associated Press reported that Ivins, who is said to have killed himself on July 29 with an overdose of prescription Tylenol mixed with codeine, was "one of the government's leading scientists researching vaccines and cures for anthrax exposure." According to the AP, he was "brilliant but troubled." His lawyer, Paul Kemp, says that Ivins passed a pair of polygraph tests and that the grand jury investigating the case was weeks from returning an indictment. Yet within days of his death, the bureau announced that it was beginning the shutdown of its "Amerithrax" investigation. "Anthrax Case a Wrap," blared the *Daily News* on Aug. 4.

In April, it was reported that the FBI had been focusing on as many as four suspects. Fox News identified them as a "former deputy commander," presumably in the U.S. Army, a "leading anthrax scientist," and "a microbiologist." The fourth suspect was given no description. Now the bureau is "confident that Dr. Ivins was the only person responsible for these attacks," according to the assurances of the U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia.

The Ivins news came close on the heels of a far quieter announcement on June 27 that the FBI's investigation of the previous top anthrax suspect, Steven Hatfill, also a USAMRIID biore-

searcher, ended not with a trial and conviction but with a \$5.8 million settlement effectively admitting that the bureau had the wrong guy. Hatfill had been hounded by investigators for three years, his career and reputation ruined.

Ivins was subjected to similar treatment. According to the AP, he complained to friends that agents had "stalked" him and his family. They offered his son \$2.5 million and "a sports car of his choice" to rat out his father. They approached his hospitalized daughter to turn evidence on him, plying her at bedside with pictures of the murdered anthrax victims and telling her, "This is what your father did." W. Russell Byrne, Ivins's supervisor at USAMRIID, told the AP that Ivins, 62, was emotionally broken by the FBI's behavior: "One person said he'd sit at his desk and weep."

Francis Boyle, a professor of law at the University of Illinois who drafted the 1989 Biological Weapons Anti-Terrorism Act signed by President George H.W. Bush, advised the FBI in its initial investigation of the anthrax letters. Along with several other American bioweapons experts—among them Jonathan King, professor of molecular biology at MIT, and Barbara Rosenberg, who studied biowarfare with the Federation of American Scientists—Boyle

warned early on that the spores issued from inside a U.S. research operation, possibly one that was classified. He provided the FBI with lists of scientists, contractors, and laboratories that had worked on anthrax projects, but he is skeptical of Ivins as the lone killer: “The Feds pursued the same strategy against Ivins as they did against Hatfill—persecute him until he broke, which Ivins did and Hatfill did not. Dead men tell no tales.”

Ivins, says Boyle, just doesn’t fit the bill. “It does not appear that he had the technological sophistication to manufacture this super weapons-grade anthrax, which would have included aerosolization, silicon coating, and an electrostatic charge.” Jeffrey Adamovicz, who directed the bacteriology division at Fort Detrick in 2003 and 2004, told McClatchy that the anthrax mailed to Sen. Tom Daschle was “so concentrated and so consistent and so clean that I would assert that Bruce could not have done that part.”

HIS **FORMER COLLEAGUES** HAVE REPEATEDLY TOLD THE MEDIA THAT, AS FAR AS THEY WERE AWARE, **IVINS DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO WEAPONIZE ANTHRAX.** HE WAS A **VACCINE SPECIALIST**, NOT A WEAPONIZER.

Following the release of the FBI’s public case against Ivins, the *New York Times* editorialized that “there is no direct evidence of his guilt” and decried the “lack of hard, incontrovertible proof.” The *Washington Post* called the case “admittedly circumstantial.” Investigators failed to place Ivins in New Jersey on the dates in September and October 2001 when the letters were reportedly mailed from a Princeton location. They swabbed his residence, locker, several cars, the tools in his laboratory, and his office space, but found no trace of anthrax that genetically

matched the bacteria in the letters. Indeed, some of the evidence—all circumstantial, none forensic—was downright laughable. Ivins at one time maintained a mailbox under an assumed name where he received pornographic magazines. He had once been “obsessed” with a Princeton sorority because of a failed college romance, and the Princeton mailbox where one of the letters originated was located within 100 yards of a storage facility used by the sorority—in a location Ivins apparently last visited 27 years ago. He drank. He made homicidal statements to a mental-health support group. He wrote rambling letters to the editor of his local paper. How any of this motivated Bruce Ivins to kill fellow Americans with a bioweapon is not established.

Moreover, his former colleagues have repeatedly told the media that, as far as they are aware, Ivins didn’t know how to weaponize anthrax. He was a vaccine specialist, not a weaponizer. The assumption is that Ivins kept his weaponizing

skills secret from his coworkers. But how did he learn those skills? Perhaps colleagues at Ft. Detrick provided the help in casual conversation. Yet there’s not the slightest indication that during his years at Ft. Detrick Ivins even once asked fellow scientists about weaponizing techniques.

Nor is it clear why Ivins—a registered Democrat—would single out Sens. Patrick Leahy and Tom Daschle to receive lethal letters. Interestingly, both had been critical impediments to passage of the Patriot Act. The first wave of anthrax mail, sent Sept. 18, 2001, tar-

geted major media; the second round, posted Oct. 9, went to Congress. On Oct. 25, amid widespread panic, the act passed. Yet it is improbable that a mad scientist would specialize in such targeted political activity—or that he personally benefited from the repercussions. Many others did, however.

“In the absence of the anthrax attacks, 9/11 could easily have been perceived as a single, isolated event,” *Salon*’s Glenn Greenwald writes. “It was really the anthrax letters that severely ratcheted up the fear levels and created the climate that would dominate in this country for the next several years ... that created the impression that social order itself was genuinely threatened by Islamic radicalism.”

By Oct. 28, ABC was reporting, “four well-placed and separate sources have told ABC News that initial tests on the anthrax by the U.S. Army at Fort Detrick, Maryland, have detected trace amounts of the chemical additives bentonite and silica”—bentonite being a hallmark of the Iraqi weapons program. (In 2007, ABC admitted that no bentonite was ever detected but refused to unmask its sources.) “Some are going to be quick to pick up on this as a smoking gun,” Peter Jennings said at the time.

The administration’s acolytes did not disappoint. William Kristol and Robert Kagan complained, “What will it take for the FBI and the CIA to start connecting the dots here? A signed confession from Saddam?” “The leading supplier suspect has to be Iraq,” the *Wall Street Journal* opined, “The government has to do everything possible to destroy the anthrax threat at its state-sponsored source.” Added Laurie Mylroie in *National Review*, “Iraqi intelligence was intimately involved in the 9/11 attacks and [the] military grade anthrax sent to Senators Leahy and Daschle almost certainly came from an Iraqi lab.” As late as 2007, long after it became apparent that

the anthrax was homegrown, outlets like Fox News continued to insist on a Middle Eastern link.

Those making the case for war in Iraq and seeking to advance the administration's domestic security agenda had good reason to resist a swift resolution to the case—especially one involving an American perpetrator. Whether by suggestion or as a result of its own incompetence, the FBI obliged.

suggesting that it came from within the limited ranks of Fort Detrick researchers—a relatively small group with access to and expertise in weaponized anthrax.

The FBI has refused to make a copy of the letter publicly available—or even to give one to Assaad himself. It did, however, share the contents with a Vassar College professor and language forensics expert named Don Foster, who famously fingered Joe Klein as the anonymous

almost immediately cleared, attempting to frame him served no purpose, except to indulge a personal enmity. To that end, Assaad suggested that the FBI question the pair of USAMRIID colleagues most likely to carry a grudge against him, Marian Rippy and Philip Zack, who years earlier had been reprimanded for sending Assaad a racist poem. Though the *Courant* reported video evidence of Zack making after-hours trips to labs where pathogens were stored, there is no record of the FBI ever investigating him or Rippy, a colleague with whom he was having an extramarital affair.

The FBI's failures don't end there. The anthrax used in the terror attacks has been identified as similar to strains held at laboratories in Ames, Iowa. The Ames database, maintained and overseen by Iowa State University, was a comprehensive culture collection of some 100 vials gathered since 1928. It listed all parties, agencies, and labs that acquired its anthrax strains. When researchers, fearful of terrorists breaching the lab, offered to destroy the anthrax cultures, the FBI did not object. "This was an astonishing thing to do," Francis Boyle tells me. "It should have been preserved as evidence. This was a roadmap of everybody and anybody that had gotten access to develop the super-strain that hit Leahy and Daschle."

Questions about the Ames database point to a bigger concern: where was the weapons-grade anthrax in the letters produced? If the FBI had an airtight case that the anthrax killer worked at Ft. Detrick—thanks to new DNA techniques supposedly linking the spores to that lab—surely the Assaad letter would be a key piece of evidence in the case against Ivins. At the very least it would have to be explained away rather than ignored.

Another possibility is that the attacks didn't originate at USAMRIID at all, and the FBI has once again accused an inno-

WHEN RESEARCHERS, FEARFUL OF TERRORISTS BREACHING THE LAB, OFFERED TO **DESTROY THE ANTHRAX CULTURES**, THE FBI DID NOT OBJECT. **"THIS WAS AN ASTONISHING THING TO DO,"** FRANCIS BOYLE TELLS ME.

As early as November 2001, the *New York Times* was reporting that the bureau's "missteps" were "hampering the inquiry." Indeed, from the beginning, the FBI has been in possession of a key piece of evidence that it apparently ignored.

Among the first suspects to come into the FBI's sights was an Egyptian-born ex-USAMRIID biologist named Ayaad Assaad. He appeared on the radar because of an anonymous letter sent to the bureau identifying him as part of a terrorist cell possibly linked to the anthrax attacks. Yet, according to the *Hartford Courant*, the FBI did not attempt to track down the author of the letter, "despite its curious timing, coming a matter of days before the existence of anthrax-laced mail became known."

Assaad was quickly exonerated by FBI investigators, and the matter swiftly dropped—though the letter may have provided the best piece of evidence in the case. It was sent prior to the arrival of the anthrax letters, suggesting foreknowledge of the attacks, and its language was similar to that of the deadly mail. Moreover, it displayed an intimate knowledge of USAMRIID operations,

author behind *Primary Colors* and helped to catch the 1996 Atlanta Olympics bomber. After reading news reports, he requested a copy of the letter, and, following his review of documents written by "some 40 USAMRIID employees," Foster "found writings by a female officer that looked like a perfect match," according to an article he authored in the October 2003 *Vanity Fair*. When he brought this seemingly crucial clue to the attention of the FBI's anthrax task force, however, the bureau declined to follow up. According to Foster, the senior FBI agent on the case had never even heard of the Assaad letter. (For the record, Foster isn't an unimpeachable source. He strayed from his area of professional expertise and published unrelated circumstantial evidence in his *Vanity Fair* piece that wrongly fingered Hatfill, who sued the magazine, which settled on undisclosed terms.)

"The letter-writer clearly knew my entire background, my training in both chemical and biological agents, my security clearance, what floor I work on, that I have two sons, what train I take to work, and where I live," Assaad told reporter Laura Rozen. Since he was

cent man. Ironically, it was Ivins who, among other investigators, was initially tasked by the FBI with analyzing the anthrax in the letters. Dr. Gerry Andrews, a professor of microbiology at the University of Wyoming and former colleague of Ivins at Ft. Detrick, wrote in the *New York Times*, "When [Ivins's] team analyzed the powder, they found it to be a startlingly refined weapons-grade anthrax spore preparation, the likes of which had never been seen before by personnel at Fort Detrick." Granted, Andrews has an interest in exonerating his former lab, but he goes on to make an astonishing allegation: "It is extremely improbable that this type of preparation could ever have been produced at Fort Detrick, certainly not of the grade and quality found in that envelope."

If the scientists at Fort Detrick did not have the capacity to produce this kind of anthrax, who did? Boyle suggests an answer in his book, *Biowarfare and Terrorism*. He alleges that the evidence in the anthrax spores, if properly pursued, would have "led directly

gon drew up plans to engineer genetically a potentially more potent variant of the bacterium that causes anthrax."

Boyle suggests possible perps: the Pentagon, the CIA, or perhaps private sector scientists acting under covert contract with the government. According to a 2002 BBC report, the CIA may indeed have been investigating "methods of sending anthrax through the mail which went madly out of control." "The shocking assertion," offered the BBC, "is that a key member of the covert operation may have removed, refined and eventually posted weapons-grade anthrax." Boyle theorizes that the FBI's investigation was purposely bungled as part of a cover-up. He argues that the legal process ensuing from a thorough investigation "would, in a court of law, directly implicate the United States government, its agencies, its officials, and its agents, in conducting illegal and criminal biowarfare research."

But if such a program exists, why would anyone associated with it risk exposure by sending crude anthrax letters? Perhaps for the oldest motive in

price—beyond the billions Congress readily rubber-stamped. "The bioterror programs are far more likely to generate new risks to public health, rather than to provide additional protections," MIT microbiologist Jonathan King says. Programs such as BioShield are "also generating a network of small and large companies planning to profit."

Hillel W. Cohen, associate professor of epidemiology and population health at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, offers a similar assessment. "Before 2001, some of us in public health described bioterrorism as an exaggerated threat," Cohen says. "No one had ever died from bioterrorism, and we warned that the proliferation of laboratories studying anthrax and other biological weapons agents was a terrible mistake, diverting money from real health needs and dangerously multiplying the number of people with access. After the 2001 anthrax letters, our warnings were buried in an avalanche of fear-mongering." Today, Cohen says, "billions are being spent to support many more such labs."

Sen. Chuck Grassley is calling for a Congressional investigation, but we may never know the identity of the anthrax killer. Was it the uninvestigated Ft. Detrick letter-writer with compelling foreknowledge? The dead scientist the FBI initially asked to investigate the attacks then later turned against? Or some other individual or group, with access to high-grade strains, who stood to benefit from a bioterror scare? We know who didn't put anthrax in the mail: Saddam Hussein or Osama bin Laden. Beyond that, all we know is that the FBI's conduct—whether by bureaucratic bungling or some kind of cover-up—makes it unlikely this case will ever be definitively closed. ■

Christopher Ketcham writes for Vanity Fair, GQ, Harper's and many other magazines.

IF THE SCIENTISTS AT FORT DETRICK DID NOT HAVE THE CAPACITY TO PRODUCE THIS KIND OF ANTHRAX, WHO DID?

back to a secret but officially sponsored U.S. government biowarfare program that was illegal and criminal, in violation of [the] Biological Weapons Anti-Terrorism Act of 1989." This might be easily dismissed as conspiracy theory except that a source no less reputable than the *New York Times* published a similar charge on Sept. 4, 2001: "the United States has embarked on a program of secret research on biological weapons that, some officials say, tests the limits of the global treaty banning such weapons. ... earlier this year, administration officials said, the Penta-

the world: money. In the wake of the postal terror, biowarfare funding under the rubric of "biodefense" received a major shot in the arm. By a vote of 99-0, the Senate passed the BioShield Act of 2004, which, on top of \$22 billion for civilian biowarfare-related "defense work" funded between 2001 and 2005, allocates \$5.6 billion through 2014 "to purchase and stockpile vaccines and drugs to fight anthrax, smallpox, and other potential agents of bioterror." Critics claim that BioShield is a form of covert offensive biowarfare planning.

Such research could come at a high

The Last Dissident

America viewed Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn as too Christian, too uncompromising, too reactionary—but we are hugely in his debt.

By Jeremy Beer

A PROPHET'S DEATH makes our shallow infotainment culture even less tolerable than usual. To see the man's passing become just another item on the ticker, juxtaposed with the latest developments in the unretirement of Brett Favre or the fascinating Paris Hilton-John McCain contretemps. To endure some dimwitted anchor's mangling of the few "facts" about his life on file in the newsroom. ("Solzhenitsyn was awarded a Nobel Prize last year," reported *Headline News*, mistaking 2008 for 1971.) To see his legacy reduced to predictably "neutral" journalistic synopses. ("Some thought him a hero, but others spied a dangerous fanatic ...")

It was all so unworthy of the great Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. He devoted his life to struggling against not just the lies of communism but, more fundamentally, the peculiarly insidious lies of secular, anthropocentric modernity, of which communism was one of the most ugly—because most ruthlessly logical—manifestations. And so, not surprisingly, in the last three decades of his life, when he was not mocked, ridiculed, or misrepresented, the perversely uncooperative Solzhenitsyn was almost entirely ignored by the news and culture industry. The tasty morsel of his death provided—finally—some usable Solzhenitsyn material. It even provided an opportunity for genuine gratitude: despite your many faults, thank you, Solzhenitsyn, for helping us overcome so unprofitable a system as communism.

Fortunately, as he once said of himself in another context, Solzhenitsyn has proved indigestible. He was not a man given to compromises. With the astonishing worldwide success of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* in 1962, and as the famously courageous author of *The First Circle* (1968), *Cancer Ward* (1968), and *The Gulag Archipelago* (1973–76), Solzhenitsyn could, after his exile from the Soviet Union in 1974, have had his choice of publishers for the rest of his working life. All he had to do was not deviate too much from the pattern that the West had set out for him. Had he just played the game a little bit—moderate this, mute that, and could you give us something a little bit shorter?—all would have been fine. Who could have blamed him?

But Solzhenitsyn was a man of conviction and calling. By *August 1914* (1971), Christian themes had become important in his work. This discomfited his secular Western audience, and the "problem" of Solzhenitsyn's profoundly Christian outlook would only deepen over time. Mistrusting and feeling betrayed by the liberal—and to his mind unpardonably stupid—Western media after his exile, he rarely gave interviews after his emigration to the United States. Then, in his Harvard commencement address of June 8, 1978, he remarked at length upon the West's self-satisfied and lazy misuse of its freedom and prosperity, "its cult of material well-being" and manifold other sins. "No, I could not recommend your

society as an ideal for the transformation of ours," confessed Solzhenitsyn. "Through deep suffering, people in our country have now achieved a spiritual development of such intensity that the Western system in its present state of spiritual exhaustion does not look attractive. ... After the suffering of decades of violence and oppression, the human soul longs for things higher, warmer, and purer than those offered by today's mass living habits, introduced as by a calling card by the revolting invasion of commercial advertising, by TV stupor, and by intolerable music."

This was not the dissident that the West had ordered up. When the speech was published, liberals spat, rinsed, and—except for occasional scurrilous asides—moved on. Many conservatives also kept their distance. For a while, Solzhenitsyn was valuable as a hammer in the Cold War toolbox, but after 1989, the American Right, too, had little use for his counsel. Not only was he a critic of our wealthy (he would say materialistic) liberal democracy, which was bad enough, he was a principled advocate of local self-government and a Russian patriot to boot—none of which was on-message with the end-of-history, America-as-the-universal-nation conservatism that became predominant in the 1990s.

He was the greatest-souled writer ever to make his adult home in the United States—not excluding Hawthorne, Melville, Faulkner, or any other American figure you might name—and

no one who mattered seemed to care. Frightened by his unorthodox Orthodoxy and the blasted seriousness of his work, American publishers gradually lost interest. No one picked up *March 1917* or *April 1917*, the last two “knots” of *The Red Wheel*. After lengthy consideration at least one major university press turned down *Two Hundred Years Together*, Solzhenitsyn’s scholarly history of the troubled relationship between ethnic Russians and Jews. Everyone passed on *Russia in Collapse*. No one even thought to ask about the short stories published by Solzhenitsyn in the 1990s or the lyrical prose poems known as “miniatures” or *A Minute a Day* or any of the other works that have appeared in Russia, France, and elsewhere since his return to Moscow.

When I became an editor at ISI Books eight years ago and began to make inquiries about Solzhenitsyn’s oeuvre, I was astonished to learn how much had yet to be translated into English. After a couple of false starts, I engaged Solzhenitsyn scholars Edward Ericson Jr. and Daniel Mahoney to compile *The Solzhenitsyn Reader*, which included almost 200 pages of previously untranslated material, including poems, short stories, miniatures, and excerpts from books such as *Russia in Collapse*, *Two Hundred Years Together*, *The Red Wheel*, and the full, 96-chapter version of *The First Circle*. Thanks to David Remnick’s interest in Russian literature and history, *The First Circle* was excerpted in the *New Yorker*. That got the attention of the slumbering HarperCollins, which after years of neglect suddenly remembered that it owned the rights to the book, asserted that claim forcefully, and finally announced last month that it would publish the full, newly translated version in 2009.

ISI Books will publish the first volume of Solzhenitsyn’s two-volume memoir of his life in the West in 2009—the title’s literal translation is something like “The

Little Grain Fell Between Two Millstones,” which gives some indication of the author’s sense of underdog isolation. There are plans to publish additional Solzhenitsyn works in the future. So perhaps a renaissance has begun.

But the truth is, we shouldn’t have needed a renaissance.

Soon after Aleksandr’s exile from the Soviet Union, the Solzhenitsyns bought a property near Cavendish, Vermont. Having considered several other options, did they know that, from a cultural standpoint, in New England they had chosen the perfect place to settle? Imagine Solzhenitsyn in the Midwest, with pies being delivered every day and obliging folks directing inquirers his way with a smile, just sure that he could use the company. Vermonters understood Solzhenitsyn in their bones. Did he have a peculiar kind of stubborn cussedness about him? Maybe. But Solzhenitsyn wasn’t a grump. He was just focused—intensely—on what he knew to be his life’s work. It was extensive, and he didn’t have much time.

That life work, he always believed, revolved around what might be called an imaginative but entirely accurate literary history of the events leading up to the Russian Revolution. *The Red Wheel*, as a consequence, commanded the majority of his time during his 20-year sojourn in the United States. No matter how history finally judges that massive work, the short stories and miniatures published after his return to Russia are perhaps more revealing of Solzhenitsyn’s reflective, rooted, humane traditionalism. In “Rooster Song,” for example, he writes:

With the depopulation, abandonment, and extinction of our villages, we have forgotten, and younger generations have never even heard, the many-voiced rooster roll call of midday. In sunny summertime, from one yard to the

next, across the street, and farther, beyond the village outskirts, how marvelous is this chorus of triumphant life.

Little else can bestow such tranquility upon the soul. Not drowned out by any noisy bustle, this vivid, vibrant, succulent, stalwart cry conveys to us that throughout these parts there reigns a blessed peace, an untroubled calm. That’s how today has unfolded so far, and why shouldn’t it continue? Carry on, everyone, your benign pursuits.

Now he is gone, 63 years after he was sentenced to the labor camps, 55 years after he was left for dead in a cancer ward in Uzbekistan, 46 years after the spectacular publication of *One Day*, 19 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, 14 years after his triumphant return to the Russia he loved.

For reasons even his biographers have been unable to pinpoint, Solzhenitsyn’s spirit was stiffened beyond human breaking by the gulag. He didn’t just tell the truth; he refused to be implicated in lies, and he made no exception for the happy-face, tantalizingly plausible lies that we Westerners, in particular, like to tell ourselves about man, the divine, and nature. His battle against late-modern anthropocentrism and his unshakeable integrity made Solzhenitsyn different from you and me, and it is why, with his death, so many have felt such a terrible sense of loss.

Let us pray for Aleksandr Isayevich Solzhenitsyn. Aleksandr Isayevich Solzhenitsyn, pray for us. ■

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Innocents Lost

For many Iraqi women, political liberation has meant sexual enslavement.

By Kelley Beaucar Vlahos

IRONY IN MOTION: Iraqi girls dance nightly in bright, clinging gowns, circling the stage like glittering chattel, swaying their hips seductively one moment, fearfully clutching the hand of a peer the next.

They were liberated, we are told, in the American invasion more than five years ago. But tonight they will service Saudi businessmen and other wealthy Arabs from U.S.-friendly Gulf states who travel to Damascus to buy the pretty flesh of Iraqi refugees. The pimps in the clubs take a 90 percent cut, while the girls—some said to be as young as 11—take their places in the perverted cakewalk.

The absurd and cruel point is lost on most Americans because the predominant debate this summer has been whether the surge won the war and at what point U.S. soldiers can come home. No one asks when these lost girls—many of whom are spending their summer as “brides” of rich Arab dandies who will use them up and divorce them in the fall—can return to Iraq. The answer doesn’t jibe with the current success narrative.

More likely than not, they don’t have homes to return to. For many Iraqi women, their options have been systematically eliminated since U.S. bombs began to fall on Iraq in March 2003. They have lost their husbands and security, their houses through violence and sectarian cleansing, their dignity and freedom to fundamentalist militias that marched into the breach when neighborhoods began breaking down. Thousands fled over the borders. Countless

others were kidnapped or coerced into leaving—including youngsters spirited away from Baghdad orphanages—and pressed into cross-border sexexploitation.

The humiliating bargain they struck to survive limits their ability to return to Iraq safely. Even if these women and girls were to locate their families, it is likely that they would be disowned, even hunted like animals and killed for soiling their clans’ reputations. So-called “honor killings” have been on the rise in Iraq since the war began. Or the women might end up with countless others in Iraqi prisons, or squatting in burned-out buildings, or back in brothels. “I have no one there and in any case I am afraid for my life,” 16-year-old Nada told BBC News in 2007. “My family has abandoned me.” She was forced into prostitution in Syria after her father dumped her at the border, and was facing deportation when the story aired.

Girls like Nada are but a fraction of the estimated 2.3 million Iraqi refugees who, if they decided to return en masse, would join some 2.7 million internally displaced Iraqis who have endured similar horrors in their own neighborhoods. Private contractors working on the U.S. taxpayers’ dime have been accused of human trafficking and running forced labor in the Green Zone, the epicenter of the foreign occupation.

Furthermore, a food crisis, drought, and an ongoing lack of the necessities—clean water, electricity, healthcare, and jobs—have made Iraq a fragile place, even if the bullets aren’t flying as frequently as a year ago.

“At this time, [we] cannot promote or encourage return to Iraq until [refugees] can do so in dignity and safety,” and that’s just not going to happen anytime soon, says Ziad Ayad, a research officer at the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Jordan, which is the primary provider of assistance to 54,000 registered Iraqi refugees there. A total of 500,000 to 750,000 Iraqis have sought refuge in Jordan—17,000 were granted visas in the last three months alone. There are approximately 1.2 million Iraqis in Syria, about 215,000 of them registered with UNHCR.

“I think the crisis itself undermines the success story that the [Bush] administration wants people to focus on,” says Abbas Kadhimi, assistant professor of national security affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School in California and a refugee of the first Gulf War. A Shi’ite from Najaf, he came to the U.S. in 1992, fleeing the wrath of Saddam Hussein. “All this good news coming out of Iraq right now,” he says, referring to the security gains associated with the surge, “will pale when they see that millions of Iraqis cannot go back to their country.”

U.S. and Iraqi officials hailed the return of some 46,000 Iraqis from Syria in the fall of 2007. But aid organizations called it a publicity stunt. Returns have since “slowed dramatically,” according to Refugees International.

Many Iraqis keep in close touch with people back home and know the situation on the ground. “I talked to one woman,” said Kathleen Newland, cofounder of the Migration Policy Institute in Washington,

“who went back [from Jordan] to check on her house. She got as far as her neighbor’s house and they said, ‘Look, don’t go there. People are living there, and they’re not friendly. They’ll kill you.’”

So these mostly middle-class Sunni Iraqis exhaust their remaining resources and live at the mercy of limited charity and the benevolence of foreign hosts. By law they aren’t allowed to work. Under-the-table jobs, where they are available, invite more exploitation and abuse. Locals, particularly Jordanians, who after 60 years host some 1.7 million Palestinians and ten sprawling refugee camps, are getting wary. Both Jordan and Syria have imposed restrictions on new entries.

“The situation is only getting increasingly desperate as the cost of living is dramatically increasing,” says Ayad, noting that fuel prices have spiked over 100 percent in Jordan. “Cash assistance isn’t keeping up with inflation.”

Freelance writer Danielle Pergament recently interviewed three Iraqi women who had resorted to prostitution in Jordan. She said, “a short time ago, they were nurses, salesclerks, students leading normal lives,” but they had no way of surviving once they reached Amman. “I have no home anymore, no family, no piece of land,” said “Malek,” a 34-year-old from Karbala who eluded death—her mother wasn’t so lucky—when their home was bombed. She was shot twice while working for the U.S. military in the Green Zone. When she fled to Jordan penniless and couldn’t find a job, she turned to prostitution.

“The crowning irony among many of the women I met: Their best clients in Amman are American and European military personnel and contractors,” Pergament wrote in a *Marie Claire* report entitled “Survival Sex.” In the article, Malek recalls her first time with a john—an American—who mistook her bullet-deformed leg from her days in the

Green Zone for a disease. After she explained that she had taken the bullets working for his government, “He told me to go.”

Relief workers say authorities in Jordan and Syria have largely ignored the plight of these Iraqi women and girls, despite the reports circulating since 2004. Only now are aid workers able to operate more freely, establishing a few safe houses for the most vulnerable. The difficulty, advocates say, is that unlike in the typical refugee camp, this population has largely melted into the urban landscape. The majority hide in fear and embrace anonymity, which helps explain why so few have registered for assistance.

Carole Laleve, who works for UNHCR in Damascus, says they have recruited female refugees to help draw out the most desperate cases. “To be honest, until a few months ago, they wouldn’t even talk about the issue of prostitution,” she reports. “Now they’re talking about it more openly.”

A conspiracy of silence in these conservative Muslim host countries, combined with a lack of international scrutiny, makes this a difficult story to tell. Statistics are elusive. Iraqi women’s rights activist Hana Ibrihim reported that more than 50,000 Iraqi girls worked in the Syrian sex industry in 2007, but her numbers were never independently confirmed.

In a hint of acknowledgement, the U.S. State Department admonished the governments of Syria and Iraq in its 2008 “Trafficking in Persons Report” for allowing Iraqis to be victimized by sexual exploitation and forced labor. There was no mention, however, of Iraqi prostitutes or labor abuses against Iraqi refugees in America’s close ally Jordan.

Even these official admissions were muted. Speaking at eager press briefings, neither Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice nor her deputies mentioned the Iraqi refugees or the

countries involved in their abuse, thus ignoring this tragic consequence of their war policy and shielding the legacy of the president.

In the absence of official data, advocates and journalists have attempted to map this overlooked hell by documenting personal stories—“one more horrific than the next,” according to Newland. One need look no further than YouTube to see scattered footage of club dancing and streetwalkers.

After posing as a customer in more than one Damascus club in 2005, freelance writer Joshua E.S. Phillips described a grim hub of girls, some orphans, others breadwinners. “One wonders why child prostitution in Syria hasn’t garnered more attention,” Phillips wrote. Considering the number of people who refused to talk for this story, shame and mistrust would seem to have a lot to do with it.

In the summer of 2007, Western news cameras did go into the clubs in Damascus and zoomed in on tiny spandexed girls—who in this country would be begging their mothers for Hannah Montana tickets—awkwardly thrusting nonexistent bosoms for the clientele. “Some have been sexually abused in Iraq, but others are being prostituted by fathers and uncles who bring them here under the pretext of protecting them,” activist Bassam al-Kadi told *The Independent* in June 2007. “They are virgins, and they are brought here like an investment and exploited in a very ugly way.”

The images came and went that summer like a garish sideshow. They seemed to have no lasting impact. As of March of this year, Syria wasn’t even doing the minimum to prosecute traffickers and pimps, according to the State Department.

Meanwhile, in Jordan, single females heading households are considered priority submissions for resettlement—but they aren’t going anywhere. Not for a

lack of trying. UNHCR has managed to place only 5,600 Jordan-based Iraqis in other countries since the beginning of 2007; only 1,472 Iraqis in Syria have resettled in that time. The U.S. has welcomed a mere 8,000 refugees since 2003. Women who are desperate to get out make plum targets for smuggling and trafficking schemes.

An Iraqi interviewed by the Associated Press in July said she doused herself and her 14-year-old daughter in gasoline in an attempt to end it all after she gave a smuggler her life savings—\$18,000—to take them over the border from Turkey to Greece. The smuggler vanished. She said she would have killed herself rather than sell her body, which seemed her only option. But her daughter's tearful pleas prevented her from lighting the match. "She was in my arms, soaked with gasoline, and shivering from fright," she said. "I was so very desperate, and there was no way out."

"The situation is getting out of hand," says Laleve. "We see a lot of women who haven't necessarily become prostitutes, but they were kidnapped, raped repeatedly, and they are in Syria all alone. That's quite clear. We did a survey of trauma and we found incredible rates of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Among children, among women, and the population in general."

Yanar Mohammed, founder of Women's Freedom in Iraq, told Pacifica News that "in Syria, we hear that some women reach the point where they are begging strangers passing by to exploit them sexually so they can feed their children."

"You know, women of Iraq were not in this situation, I would say, six years ago. We did not have to do this. We did not have to go through humiliation, through prostitution. We did not have to beg in the embassies to be accepted in the Western world, when the attack on our lives came from the West."

The State Department reports that the U.S. has devoted \$208 million to refugee assistance this year—a meager sum when one considers the estimated \$430 million a day the U.S. spends on military operations in Iraq.

"This sends a very wrong message, not only to the region, but to Iraqi civilians," says Kristele Younes, an advocate for Refugees International and a frequent visitor to Jordan and Syria. "Of course the problem is finding any political will on the part of the administration to even acknowledge the extent of the situation. They think people would see that as an acknowledgement of failure."

Newland, who traveled to the region as recently as February, calls the U.S. contribution "deleterious and stingy," but says that Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki hasn't cloaked himself in glory either. "The Iraqi government has been absolutely disgraceful in helping the Iraqi refugees—they've given practically no money, and they have lots of money. That's one thing they do have. There seems to be a very large gap between what they say and what they do."

"morally wrong." Sectarian cleansing has reordered the Iraqi map, reducing the daily violence, but every humanitarian metric shows there is only a shell of a country to return to, and women are still extremely vulnerable.

According to Maha Sidky of UNHCR in Baghdad, women "enjoy less freedom of movement," and safe houses are few. The State Department's trafficking report indicates that Maliki has let another year pass without taking "any meaningful action to address trafficking in persons over the reporting period."

As for direct American complicity, there have been fleeting anecdotes about the availability of prostitutes for U.S. military personnel and other Westerners inside the country, but this isn't Saigon 40 years ago. A domestic sex trade exists—CNN reports that widows in Baghdad sell their bodies for as little as \$8—though culture, religion, and discipline have conspired to drive it underground.

Investigative journalist Patrick Cockburn wrote of hearing about Iraqi prostitutes scrawling Arabic anti-occupation slogans in lipstick across the bathroom

IRAQI PROSTITUTES HAVE BEEN **SCRAWLING ARABIC ANTI-OCCUPATION SLOGANS IN LIPSTICK** ACROSS THE BATHROOM MIRRORS IN THE GREEN ZONE.

Maliki, flush with more than \$70 billion in oil revenues this year, went to Europe recently to lobby for more aid. He told leaders that Iraq would soon be able to welcome back millions of refugees. But relief advocates fear that countries like the U.S. will take this as a license to restrict resettlements further.

And while a visible wave of Iraqis coming home would ensure a PR coup for Maliki and the Bush administration, reality would be less kind to the returning refugees. "If you push people to return," charges Younes, "it will further destabilize the country." Newland calls it

mirrors in the Green Zone. There were also reports of Iraqi prostitutes among the Army guards involved in the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal in 2004. And in April, whistleblower Bruce Halley testified before the Senate Democratic Policy Committee that his former site manager, a subcontractor for DynCorp—whose employees had been accused in the 1990s of running an underage prostitution ring in the Balkans—had been engaged in delivering prostitutes from Kuwait to hotels operated by DynCorp in Baghdad. The story went nowhere.

These brief illuminations suggest but don't fully reveal what happened to "The Missing Girls of Iraq," as *Time* called them in 2006. They may be dancing on the stages of Damascus nightclubs, begging on street corners, tying on suicide-bomber vests, or getting murdered by their own families.

One of the rationales for invading Iraq was to liberate the Iraqi people from an evil man, but it seems that many Iraqis just swapped tormentors. It's fashionable in pro-war circles to talk up women's rights when it comes to beating back the perceived Islamization of Canada or Western Europe, but criticizing our hands-off approach to the depravity spawned by this war invites charges of disloyalty and defeatism.

Before she was murdered outside her home in Mosul last summer, investigative journalist Sahar Hussein al-Haideri wrote about Iraqi families who—knowingly or not—sold their daughters to local pimps, killing for them any hope of a normal future in Iraq.

She interviewed "Zaineb," a 20-year-old who took what she thought was a legitimate job to support her mother and siblings. She was immediately forced into prostitution. "[My boss] and his friends always take me to a farm, where they get drunk, and then have sex with me. I cry, asking for help from my father and mother, but how can they hear me?"

"It cuts to the heart of a society," says Abbas Kadhimi, who notes that the women of Iraq—at least before the crackdown that followed the first Gulf War—were active participants in Iraqi social and political life. "Certainly the politicians, whose failure caused this tragedy, should be punished—not the wretched girl who is the victim." ■

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Czechoslovakia on Their Minds

Neocon news flash: Hitler invades Georgia.

By Leon Hadar

NEOCONSERVATIVES and their useful idiots in the American media have been on overdrive this August, rewinding to their World War II analogies and applying them to the fast-forwarding world of global politics. Exhibit A: the obvious likeness of the 2008 Beijing Olympics to the 1936 Berlin Games. Hitlergram of the Month was the parallel drawn between Nazi-era filmmaker turned propagandist Leni Riefenstahl, who was invited by the Führer to film the Olympics in Berlin—the result being the technically and aesthetically impressive documentary "Olympia"—and the celebrated Chinese director Zhang Yimou, who was commissioned by his government to produce the magnificent opening ceremonies of the Beijing Olympics. The power of analogy, there for the China-bashers' taking.

But no neocon narrative is complete without Czechoslovakia. Imagine your average *Weekly Standard* subscriber taking a free-association test and being asked to state the first words that come to his mind when he hears "Czechoslovakia." Rest assured, he would respond with "Munich," "appeasement," "Chamberlain," or "umbrella." And let's not forget "Hitler." Thus can anyone clamoring for U.S. military intervention in, say, the former Yugoslavia or the Persian Gulf, mount a successful media and public-relations campaign by identifying his chosen victim (the Muslims of

Bosnia and Kosovo, or Kuwait, or the Kurds) with Czechoslovakia and associating his preferred "aggressor" (Slobodan Milosevic or Saddam Hussein) with Hitler. Those Americans who resist pressure to deploy U.S. troops abroad to save the victim from the aggressor are appeasers leading the world into another Munich.

Here we go again. "The details of who did what to precipitate Russia's war against Georgia are not very important," explained leading neocon foreign-policy ideologue Robert Kagan—who insists that he isn't a neocon at all—in a column in the *Washington Post* three days after the eruption of hostilities between Russia and Georgia over the breakaway province of South Ossetia. "Do you recall the precise details of the Sudeten Crisis that led to Nazi Germany's invasion of Czechoslovakia?" he asked. Kagan, one of the chief advisers to Republican presidential candidate John McCain, wants to kick "revisionist" Russia out of the G-8 and establish a League of Democracies as part of a strategy to contain the growing threat from Moscow. Kagan's answer to his rhetorical question in his column titled "Putin Makes his Move" (wink, wink—like you-know-who made his move 70 years ago): "Of course not, because that morally ambiguous dispute is rightly remembered as a minor part of a much bigger drama."

That would also be our new drama in which “little” Czechoslovakia becomes “tiny” Georgia, the South Ossetians stand in for the Sudeten Germans, Mikheil Saakashvili is Eduard Benes, Putin does Hitler, and we, of course, are required to reprise the role of Churchill. But according to Kagan the dramatist, there is a danger that we’ll be tempted to beat our swords into umbrellas: “Now, as then, however, [feelings] are being manipulated to justify autocracy at home [in Russia] and to convince Western powers that accommodation—or to use the once-respectable term, appeasement—is the best policy.”

The U.S. military is fighting two major wars in the Broader Middle East—perhaps three soon, if we follow the neocon advice to strike Iran—paid for by the central bankers in Beijing, Tokyo, and Seoul. What sense does it make for Washington to risk a costly diplomatic conflict and perhaps a military confrontation with Russia over a local dispute in the Caucasus?

It makes perfect sense to Georgia’s president, Mikheil Saakashvili. After carefully studying his *Neoconservatism for Dummies* guide—required reading for any leader of a “color revolution” seeking U.S. dollars and troops—he began trying to convince Americans to “save” his country from the Russian “revanchists” by comparing Georgia to Czechoslovakia in 1938, warning that the defeat of Georgia at the hands of the Russians would be a blow against Western interests and values worldwide. After Georgia falls, Ukraine would become the next target for Russia’s beligerence. And before you know it, the new Russian petro-empire would be dominating Eurasia, recreating the old Soviet Union—with Russian nationalism and the Eastern Orthodox Church replacing Communism as ideological glue—and forcing Western Europe, dependent economically on Russia’s

energy resources, to submit to Moscow’s dictates. Hence the need for America to draw the line at the border between Georgia and Russia.

But Americans who read a bit closer have to conclude that the conflict doesn’t involve core U.S. strategic and economic interests and that the moral and historical claims being raised by the warring sides are at best ambiguous. In fact, as seen from Moscow, it’s the U.S. that has reneged on commitments it made at the end of the Cold War. In the Kremlin’s view, America has been implementing an aggressive military strategy aimed at weakening Russia by extending NATO to its borders, installing U.S. antiballistic missiles in Poland and the Czech Republic, and obliterating a former ally in the Balkans while strengthening rising anti-Russian forces in Ukraine and the Caucasus, areas that were traditionally seen by Russia as part of its sphere of influence.

Wouldn’t Americans see Russian policy as hostile if Moscow invited Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador to join the military pact of the Shanghai Treaty Organization? Or encouraged a Russian-government-backed version of the National Endowment for Democracy to assist anti-American political parties in activities against pro-American governments in Mexico, Panama, and Costa Rica? Or installed Russian antiballistic missiles in Cuba? Wouldn’t U.S. troops be landing in Panama if a pro-Russian government in Bogota, clamoring to join the STO, tried to regain control of Panama, which in a move backed by the U.S. seceded from Colombia in 1903 and became an American protectorate?

From that perspective, Russian backing for the separatist movements in South Ossetia and Abkhazia and the deployment of Russian troops in the region seem perfectly logical. Georgia,

like the former Yugoslavia, is a multiethnic state, and not unlike the Muslims in Kosovo and Bosnia, both South Ossetians and Abkhazians have their own language, culture, history, and separatist aspirations. While the Russians were willing to freeze the status quo in these autonomous regions, the decision by the U.S. and its European allies to demand political independence for Kosovo, coupled with recent American efforts to bring Georgia into NATO, dared Russian leaders to act forcefully in response to Saakashvili’s move to retake South Ossetia. If Americans assume the right to force nationalist and somewhat democratic and geographically distant Serbia to relinquish control over Kosovo, it shouldn’t come as a shock that Russians attempt to put similar pressure on the nationalist and somewhat democratic and geographically close Georgia when it comes to South Ossetia.

Kagan is wrong. The details of who did what to precipitate the war in the Caucasus are very important. It’s quite possible that the “revisionist” U.S. policy in the region—and especially its strategy of extending NATO to the borders of Russia—may have encouraged Saakashvili to test Russian resolve and try to turn South Ossetia and Abkhazia into the frontier of a new Cold War. Worse, forcing the U.S. to set up a tripwire that would have to be maintained by American military power could ignite a hot war between the two sides.

Only by refraining from falling into Saakashvili’s trap and by “appeasing” Russia will Washington ensure that the local and morally ambiguous dispute in the Caucasus does not turn into a larger global drama. ■

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The End of Democracy?

In his 1937 *Great Contemporaries*, Winston Churchill wrote, “Whatever else may be thought about [Hitler’s] exploits, they are among the most remarkable in the

whole history of the world.” He was referring not only to Hitler’s political triumphs—the return of the Saar and reoccupation of the Rhineland—but his economic achievements. By his fourth year in power, Hitler had pulled Germany out of the Depression, cut unemployment from 6 million to 1 million, grown the gross national product 37 percent, and increased automobile production from 45,000 vehicles a year to 250,000. City and provincial deficits had vanished.

In material terms, Nazi Germany was a startling success. And not only Churchill but others in Europe and America were marveling at the Third Reich, its fascist ally Italy, and Joseph Stalin’s rapidly industrializing Soviet state. “I have been over into the future, and it works,” Lincoln Steffens had bumbled. Many Western men, seeing the democracies mired in Depression and moral malaise, were also seeing the future in Berlin, Moscow, Rome. In Germany, Hitler was winning plebiscites with more than 90 percent of the vote in what outside observers said were free elections.

What calls to mind the popularity of the Third Reich and the awe it inspired abroad—even after the bloody Röhm purge, the Nazi murder of Austrian Chancellor Dollfuss in 1934, and the anti-Semitic Nuremberg laws—is a poll buried in the *New York Times*.

In a survey of 24 countries by Pew Research Center, the nation that emerged as far and away first on earth in the satisfaction of its people was China. No other nation even came close.

“Eighty-six percent of Chinese people surveyed said they were content with the country’s direction, up from 48 percent in 2002. ... And 82 percent of Chinese were satisfied with their national economy, up from 52 percent,” said the *Times*.

Yet China has a regime that punishes dissent, severely restricts freedom, persecutes Christians and all faiths that call for worship of a God higher than the state, brutally represses Tibetans and Uighurs, swamps their native lands with Han Chinese to bury their cultures, and threatens Taiwan.

China is also a country where Maoist ideology has been replaced by a racial chauvinism and raw nationalism reminiscent of Italy and Germany in the 1930s. Two-thirds of all Chinese, however, say the government is doing a good job in dealing with the issues of greatest concern to them.

And what nation is it whose people rank as third most satisfied? Vladimir Putin’s Russia. Moscow is today more nationalistic, less democratic, and more confrontational toward the West than it has been since before the fall of communism. Yet, wrote the *Times*, “Russians were the third most satisfied people with their country’s direction, at 54 percent, despite Western concerns about authoritarian trends.”

Of the largest nations on earth, the two that today most satisfy the desires of their peoples are the most authoritarian.

High among the reasons, of course, are the annual 10 percent to 12 percent growth China has experienced over the

last decade and the wealth pouring into Russia for the oil and natural gas with which that immense country abounds. Still, is this not disturbing? In China and Russia, the greatest of world powers after the United States, people seem to value freedom of speech, religion, or the press far less than they do a rising prosperity and national pride and power. And they seem to have little moral concern about crushing national minorities.

Contrast, if you will, the contentment of Chinese and Russians with the dissatisfaction of Americans, only 23 percent of whom told the Pew poll they approved of the nation’s direction. Only one in five Americans said they were satisfied with the U.S. economy.

Other polls have found 82 percent of Americans saying the country is headed in the wrong direction, only 28 percent approving of President Bush’s performance, and only half that saying they approve of the Congress. In Britain, France, and Germany only three in 10 expressed satisfaction with the direction of the nation.

Liberal democracy is in a bear market. Is it a systemic crisis as well?

In his 1989 essay, “The End of History?” Francis Fukuyama wrote of the ultimate world triumph of democratic capitalism. All other systems had fallen, or would fall by the wayside. The future belonged to us.

Democratic capitalism, it would appear, now has a great new rival—autocratic capitalism. In Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America, nations are beginning to imitate the autocrats of China and Russia, as some in the 1930s sought to ape fascist Italy and Nazi Germany.

The game is not over yet. We are going into extra innings. ■

All Roads Lead to Rome

Mogul Tom Monaghan envisioned Ave Maria as the perfect faithful community. But will its residents sing from the same hymnal?

By Michael Brendan Dougherty

SIX YEARS AGO, Tom Monaghan, the Domino's Pizza founder turned Catholic philanthropist, flew over southwest Florida and saw a dream become possible. Amid the run-down tomato farms, he would transplant his Michigan-based Ave Maria University and develop an entire community by the same name, putting the church physically and spiritually at its center. For a time, he even hoped to ban pornography and contraceptives there. But just a year after the town opened, Ave Maria has attracted more controversy and fewer residents than Monaghan ever expected.

The ten-mile Oil Well Road that runs west from the sprawl of Naples to Ave Maria is narrow and dangerous. It becomes slick in the rain, and mile-long stretches are surrounded by pools of standing water—breeding grounds for mosquitoes. Driving away from the gulf and its breezes, the temperature can rise as much as ten degrees during the trip. Construction vehicles traveling to Ave Maria or to Immokalee, its much poorer neighbor, careen down the road at 80 miles per hour, scaring the new residents. Builders want the county to expand the road to six lanes with a manicured median, but tax receipts aren't yet sufficient to support that vision.

Near Ave Maria Boulevard, one of two entrances to the town, the rough and thick of the Everglades falls away, replaced by fields of trim sod. Flanked by two huge waterfall installations bearing the town's name, the four-lane thor-

oughfare is immaculately landscaped with sable palms and buttonwood. The effect is transporting and pleasant at first, but after several miles turns monotonous and unsettling.

The few hundred residents are divided among four neighborhoods that surround the college campus. On the south side are Dell Webb and Bellera Walk. The former is built around a golf course designed by Gordon Lewis and a recreation center called South Park. Bellera Walk is a gated community featuring dozens of manmade ponds and lakes. Neither neighborhood is within walking distance of the town center; both are marketed to "active adults" by Pulte Homes, the homebuilder. At the far northern end of town is Emerson Park, which contains the lowest-priced homes, starting in the high \$200s. This section of town has filled up most quickly and is within walking distance of baseball and soccer fields and a parochial K-12 school. Near the town center is Hampton Village, where many professors live. Each neighborhood has four model homes near its entrance. The developer offers 16 designs; variation depends on buying a screened patio with a pool. At full capacity, Ave Maria would have 11,000 homes, but so far only about 300 have been built.

At the center of this town is Ave Maria Oratory, an imposing and strange steel and stone building. It sits in La Piazza, an awkwardly named square with commercial property on the ground level

and luxury apartments above. The sidewalks are wide enough to accommodate outdoor seating for restaurants that have yet to arrive. There is a jewelry shop, a supply store for homeschoolers, a coffee and smoothie shop, and the university bookstore. The architecture is friendly, bright, and soft, a facsimile of New Urbanist ideas.

When I first approached it, builders were entering and exiting the sides of the oratory as they finished work on the confessionals. Throughout La Piazza, audio speakers emitted insipid smooth jazz. Claire, a recent graduate and current employee of the university, leaned against the railing on the steps, waiting for a friend. She asked for my first impressions, and I ventured that putting a church like this in the center of town seemed unusual. She shot back, "It's not unusual at all. Every town in Europe is like this, and was built this way, with the church—God—at its center." She implied that it was the rest of America—suburbanized, unchurched or megachurched, and anonymous—that was the real aberration. Her friend walked over to us—a priest in a long black cassock. The two departed to a bench across the street where she bowed her head and made her confession to the tune of ambient tenor saxophones.

Claire was correct that cities in Europe have churches at their centers, but they almost always have a port or thoroughfare—some economic reason for existing as well. Ave Maria, far from

being an organic entity, is the product of Monaghan's tremendous largesse and the investments of his partners, Barron Collier and Pulte Homes.

Barron Collier, the company that has been selling Collier County real estate for decades, donated all of the land for the university and allowed Monaghan to be a 50-percent partner in the town's development. In return, the magnate promised to reinvest all profits he received from the town into the school. Monaghan paid Barron Collier \$51 million for his half of the housing project and more than \$60 million for his half of the preserved land also owned by Barron Collier. Pulte, one of the largest builders of production houses in the country, took on the expansive project of constructing Ave Maria's homes. Together, Monaghan, Barron Collier, and Pulte have spent over \$200 million.

Unfortunately for them, southwest Florida has been hit particularly hard by the real-estate crisis. When the town opened, Ave Maria's homes were priced well below the median home price in the county. But as values elsewhere have continued to plummet, the community becomes less of a bargain.

The downturn was expected, says Blake Gable, Ave Maria's project manager: "We knew that home values could not continue increasing at 40 percent a year. It was ludicrous." But the depth of the crisis shocked the developers. In a little over a year, the county appraiser's office has recorded just 295 deeds in Ave Maria, only 13 percent of the figure projected in 2005. This number is still better than the rest of the region. Shelton Weeks of Florida Gulf Coast University's Lucas Institute for Real Estate Development and Finance told the *Naples News* that these figures were, "impressive or at the least respectable." Unlike other developments in the region, Ave Maria's homes were not sold to speculators, and none is in foreclosure. There are no "for

rent" signs in Ave Maria and very few unoccupied homes, as Pulte only builds houses that they have already sold.

But even if there are no housing failures, there are few of the necessities of suburban life. The nearest pharmacy is almost 12 miles away. The closest gas station is seven miles outside of town. The town's fire engine and ambulance sit next to a few trailers on an undeveloped tract of land. Between Bellera Walk and the town center, roadside signs like Park of Commerce or Southern Fitness Center sit in front of bulldozers. A Publix grocery store, a gas station, and a bank (owned by a Baptist) will open in the next year, good news for Gable and his partners at Pulte who believe that lack of these basic conveniences has deterred buyers, especially retirees.

THE SALES OFFICE IN AVE MARIA IS PLASTERED WITH THE DEVELOPER'S SLOGAN: "EVERY LIFESTYLE, EVERY FAMILY, EVERY DREAM."

No crime has been reported in Ave Maria, though county police occasionally station themselves at the town's entrance, looking for speeders. The town's roads and common property are quietly governed by the Ave Maria Stewardship Community District, a five-member board appointed by the town's investors. Just this August, the board rendered an assessment on homes in Ave Maria that will cost families more than \$1,200, in addition to county taxes. It surprised most residents, who had just a dim awareness of the board's existence. It will only become an elected body after many more hundreds of people move in.

While most planned communities in Florida rely on retirees living off their savings, the families at Ave Maria need employment, and those who don't work for the university have a 40-minute commute to Naples. So it was with great fan-

fare that town developers recently announced a deal with Arthrex, a Florida-based manufacturer of medical devices, to open a 29,000-square-foot facility in the town next year, bringing with it hundreds of jobs.

The housing crisis has stalled the plans of Catholics who are already part of the community. I met half a dozen people who moved to the surrounding area when they heard of the project, hoping to get in early. They have been delayed in moving into town because of the difficulty in breaking even on homes they bought in the area in the last three years. Mike McDonald, who moved from Ann Arbor to the outskirts of Immokalee, is typical of these pioneers. He met his wife on a Catholic singles website. They became serious and mar-

ried a year later. They want to raise their family in a safe neighborhood where their faith is respected. McDonald attends Mass at the oratory and will send his children to the parochial school there. He'll move to Ave Maria as soon as he can, even if it means a small loss on his home outside the town. It's this level of dedication that caused *Portfolio* to speculate, "for a certain type of buyer, zealous faith is, if not quite recession-proof, then at least recession-resistant."

But Pulte is not at all interested in pitching their houses exclusively to Catholics. The sales office in Ave Maria is plastered with the developer's slogan: "Every Lifestyle, Every Family, Every Dream." One resident arched an eyebrow. "Lifestyle? Makes it sound like a commune for queers, the dying, and dying queers."

While I was there, Pulte hosted a Family Fun Event in North Park, taking

prospective buyers on bus tours of the community. Vice president of sales Jill Hoffman described the oratory and university as “another amenity. ... Some may come for the waterpark or the safe streets, others because of the oratory.” Hoffman mentions that one of the town’s first residents is Jewish, “and she loves it.” Gable, an Episcopalian, hints that the town is already in talks with other denominations that might bring their churches in. When I asked whether he thought most people moved in because they shared values with Ave Maria’s residents, he countered, “That’s not necessarily religious.”

But Pulte and Barron Collier cannot hide the fact that up and down Ave Maria Boulevard are minivans with bumper stickers like “Abortion: One Dead, One Wounded” and “Follow Me Because I Follow the Pope.” Even if Ave Maria will soon have an Episcopal church, its probable location will be on John Paul II Boulevard. The town itself is purposely angled so that sunlight shines directly down its eastern streets on the Feast of the Annunciation. The cultural offerings in the town will come almost exclusively through a university that sees itself as the vanguard of restoring orthodoxy to the Roman Church. During the school year, 10 percent of the students gather each night to walk the campus and recite the rosary.

Pulte tries to sell homes in Ave Maria as it sells them anywhere else. But these buyers are not just looking for pickleball courts. Many are searching for the spirit of the old white ethnic neighborhoods in New York or Chicago, where Italian, Irish, and Polish children beat each other up on Fridays, confessed their sins on Saturday afternoons, and served together as altar boys on Sunday mornings. One airline pilot tells me he is grateful that his son can ride his bicycle and “there are other sets of eyes watching out for him here.” I toured model

homes in Emerson Park with a couple who taught Latin in a Philadelphia Catholic school and could expound on the style of habits and the relative orthodoxy of nearly every group of nuns in the country.

Naturally, Ave Maria has attracted lots of attention in the mainstream press. *GQ* and the *New Yorker* have profiled the town and Monaghan respectively, portraying the place and its founder as at best eccentricities but potentially a theocratic menace. The town’s founders, acutely sensitive to these criticisms and anxious to have their accomplishments recognized, have gone through “an identity crisis” according to one former fundraiser. Monaghan quickly backed away from his comments about keeping contraceptives out, and key players in the project have secretly discussed changing the name of the town, fearing that the presumed religious intensity is turning off buyers. But it’s too late to change the character of Ave Maria.

MONAGHAN QUICKLY BACKED AWAY FROM HIS COMMENTS ABOUT **KEEPING CONTRACEPTIVES OUT**, AND KEY PLAYERS IN THE PROJECT HAVE SECRETLY DISCUSSED **CHANGING THE NAME OF THE TOWN**.

Gable points to “a handful of stories, that, if you just read them, yeah, you would think, ‘Wow that place is really strange.’” Some articles have made fun of the artwork at The Bean, Ave Maria’s first business, a coffee and smoothie shop adjacent to the oratory. Its walls have photographs of military chaplains saying Mass and hearing confessions during World War II. The Bean’s menu features Pope Clement VIII’s apocryphal quote, “Coffee is too good to be just for the infidels. Let us baptize it as a drink good for Christians too.” It also sells beer, not just Budweiser but Trappe, made by Catholic monks. Cou-

ples quickly make the sign of the cross before eating their grilled sandwiches. But, sitting beneath a portrait of a saint, Gable maintains that Ave Maria is not an exclusively Catholic town and that the locals will make of it whatever they want: “It’s not something we can control. Residents make a town.”

Across the street, the homeschoolers’ supply store provides rosaries, long out of print editions of English verse, and *Wheelock’s Latin Grammar*. The customers are charming, bright, self-aware Catholics. But a visit to Sunday Mass demonstrates that unity in doctrine can be superficial. Though 99 percent of residents are Catholic, the town has its own religious controversies.

After the 10 AM Mass, several worshippers mock Monaghan’s devotion to architect Frank Lloyd Wright, the inspiration for his oratory. Gesturing at the jumble of steel latticework and the abstract light fixtures, one man sighs and shakes his head. Another says the

face of the church looks like “a stone rendering of a cartoon rocket-ship on a steel launch pad.” Another mourns, “Anything would be better than this.” They have reasons to gripe—the back wall is crossed with drooping diagonal seams that make the priest celebrating Mass look like he is moving across a giant spider’s web.

The oratory embodies the internal controversies and contracted expectations of Ave Maria. Originally, Monaghan planned a transparent structure that would hold 3,300 worshippers, making it the largest church in the country. But traditional Catholics groaned at its

resemblance to the evangelical Crystal Cathedral in Los Angeles. Michael S. Rose, an author of several books on church architecture, pointed out that Monaghan's hero, Wright, "rejected the European heritage of churches, disdainfully referring to them as 'sepulchres.'" Partisans of sustainable building were also horrified—a glass cathedral in the Everglades would be an environmental disaster. Architectural students at Notre Dame submitted alternative designs, drawing on Spanish mission traditions.

It is not just the architecture of the church that bothers some residents; it's the worship inside. Nick Healy, the university president, formerly worked at Franciscan University of Steubenville, a Catholic college in Ohio that supports the small charismatic movement in the church. His preferred form of worship includes evangelical-style praise and worship bands, but Ave Maria has mostly attracted traditionalist Catholics who prefer the old Latin Mass and Gregorian chant. Healy feared that Latin liturgy would turn what he calls the "broad Catholic middle" against the university and spoil the development of the town. A former corporate lawyer, he has a penchant for conflict and has dismissed priests whose liturgical tastes ran counter to his.

Bishop Frank Dewane of the Venice diocese initially postponed dedicating the oratory, thereby preventing Mass from being said publicly—a stunning power play. While all sides refuse to comment on the delay, insiders report that it was part of a contest over who ultimately had control over the sacraments at Ave Maria: Nick Healy or the Church. Dewane installed Fr. Robert Tatman as pastor of the "quasi-parish" and demanded that the Latin Mass be offered over Healy's protests. Healy dutifully told media outlets, "Father Tatman seems like a wonderful priest. I think he's very pastoral ... from what I can see he's not overly

demanding." But he preferred two other priests for the job, Fr. Richard McAlear, a charismatic priest who performs "healing Masses," or the university chaplain, Fr. Robert Garrity, whom a former colleague of Healy's describes as a "conman." One priest who has said Mass in the oratory is delighted by the bishop's winning gambit: "The new bishop is very sound and very strong, very insistent on the fact that he is the bishop and no layman will do his job, and he has appointed a very good pastor. The communion rails are coming back now."

Despite these intra-Catholic quarrels and the schmaltzy suburban sheen, Ave Maria has its charms. The Emerson Park neighborhood is filled with children pedaling to the swings and slides or crowding the waterpark. A town band has formed, composed of residents and students. Former employees of the university who went through terrible fights with Monaghan and Healy during the formation of the community still worship there or plan to send their children to the school.

Jeff Culbreath, a Catholic blogger living in California, expressed succinctly the reservations that many Catholics, even some residents, feel toward Ave Maria: "I would have preferred to see something much more modest. The sheer grandiosity of Tom Monaghan's vision worries me. The prices are too high, the instant neighborhoods too much like suburbia, the crucifix in the chapel too big ... the ambiance of luxury and convenience too contrary to the spirit of Catholicism." Yet Culbreath, like many others, cannot resist the idea of a Catholic oasis standing apart from an American culture that increasingly feels alien and morally dangerous. "Perhaps this is the only kind of Catholic community that can succeed in America today," he concluded, "we could certainly do much worse, and we usually do." ■

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Auto Asphyxiation

When cars drive our lives and cameras enforce our laws

By Dennis Dale

PULLING UP TO A RED LIGHT in an irresponsible state of fatigue, I was stirred from my torpor by a flash overhead. I cursed, thinking the automated stoplight camera had taken my photo, attributing some infraction unwarranted or obscure to me. But then my irritation gave way to a fanciful sense of threat as I noticed the same flash, accompanied by a faint click, illuminating every passing car, as if to remind us of its presence and capability should any grow bold in the assumption that no one is looking.

Our new camera system had introduced itself by mail weeks before, ticketing me for that longtime indulgence: turning right on a red light without coming to a complete stop—what is sometimes called a “boulevard” or “California” stop. (This latter construct, I imagine, is destined to become an archaic curiosity, as soon no one will associate such laxity with a state in the vanguard of the prohibitionist assault on smoking and fatty foods.)

When the ticket arrived in the mail, my daughter and I, who share the offending car, were left wondering which of us was responsible. A machine took a picture of a machine, and a man was accused of an indiscretion. Human involvement, if not yet unnecessary, was at least not in evidence. The car might as well have been driving itself.

I paid my \$112 ticket dutifully and ruefully as always but with an added sense of powerlessness, as if I’d become nothing more than a conduit for transferring small amounts of capital from the private sector to the public coffers.

The transaction couldn’t have occurred without me, but I still couldn’t help feeling a bit superfluous.

This admittedly petty encounter cast in relief for me the erosion of something I take for granted: the unregulated and unmonitored existence. The encroachment on my life was slight and might have been justified in light of public safety—driving is, after all, an earned privilege, not a given right. But one can be excused for wondering where these fractional progressions in the unassailable name of safety are leading us.

I further found myself nostalgic for that other human marginalized by this transaction, the traffic cop: for his inconvenient intrusions, his occasional severity and lecturing, his indifference to the real criminals, his being forever chastised for not pursuing—presumably in 1970s cop-show fashion—a speeding getaway car or engaging in a foot chase through a gritty alleyway. You truly never know what you have until it’s gone.

The unsleeping automation of the stoplight camera, in relieving us of the cost and imperfection of man—his wandering attention, his occasional laziness, his bias—purges this interaction of the nobler and softening humanity the traffic cop brings: his occasional exception for the impoverished working man or harried single mother, his fellowship tempting him to overlook the slight transgression in hope of establishing goodwill, his vanity to appear magnanimous and “let you off with a warning.”

The fiscal logic of these systems suggests that they will prevail and prolifer-

ate to the point that soon there will be no cop on the ground to find an offense understandable or minor. Automation strips society of a bit of its humanity along with those humans it renders superfluous and economically unjustifiable. But we are all complicit, voting with our wallets and with whatever instinct compels me to turn a trip to the grocery store into a solitary experience by using another recent innovation, automated checkout lines. I’m not pointing fingers but owning up. By gladly and with little introspection ridding ourselves of the difficulties inherent in human interaction, we are rendering it increasingly obsolete.

Not every human exchange deserves a eulogy. The traffic cop, like traffic, is a relatively recent necessity. Whatever ill effects I cite or merely imagine here, the truth is that surrendering authority to the automated-camera-cop is properly seen as another cost of our combustion-engine culture. Concerns about marginal sacrifices of privacy haven’t a chance once we’ve accepted a loss of life on a human scale in return for the comfort and isolation of our beloved cars.

I had to leave L.A. to appreciate how it has become a purgatory designed more for cars than for people. The cars seem to understand this as they angrily crowd the freeways, exhaling carbon monoxide and dissecting the city into concrete islands cut off from one another by metallic streams of automobiles, sometimes moving at glacial pace, sometimes a torrent crushing anything that dares intrude. Heat and poison rise

up from these fetid canals. If a person does manage to get himself killed on a freeway, more cars rush in, discharging humans tasked with cleaning up the mess as quickly as possible so the cars, bearing down in a thickening mass, can be relieved. Within these cars, humans are temporarily trapped, fuming and powerless. Occasionally one of them lashes out violently.

People love cars. I love cars. But cars do not love us back. The familiar science-fiction theme of technology turning on humanity finds no better exemplar than the automobile. In most of our cities, cars took over long ago. They have determined our way of life for some time now. Our relationship with the car is a love affair incorporating betrayal, jealousy, disappointment, and domestication—and, like all love affairs, a great deal of uncertainty regarding its end.

Death and injury, poisoned air encasing cities dismembered by roadways, and neighborhoods ghettoized by impassable barriers—these are the obvious consequences of the way we have chosen to live. But the attendant small compromises herald a new model of the public square, enforced by automation via machines lurking overhead, in an environment in which we increasingly move about without engaging others. We're fine with this, bowing to the logic of safety and welcoming the lessened need for human contact and the demands it places on our dignity and comfort. We scurry from the insular confines of our workspaces to the electronic cocoon of home, where we turn our attention on a world mediated by something akin to a funhouse mirror made of two-way glass. With the advent of the reality cop show and the surveillance camera, we now exist on each side of an odd new arrangement, interrogator and interrogated. One is never alone and always alone.

The impulse to compose this came as I sat at another red light, also monitored by a camera, this one tilting down like an aimed rifle, the stoplight itself seized or merely stubborn, with no human or his conveyance visible in any direction. I realized the option of looking both ways and proceeding, of trumping the machinery with considered human judgment, was no

longer available—or at least no longer allowed. Trapped, if only for a moment, between the unblinking severity of automation and its clumsy malfunctioning, I chuckled to myself, indulging impotent laughter in comfortable safety. ■

Dennis Dale's blog, Untethered, can be found at www.dennisdale.blogspot.com.

Future Perfect

Stop worrying and learn to love expensive oil.

By Brian Kaller

PEAK OIL HAS ARRIVED—not just the geological phenomenon but the movement of the same name.

The geological part is straightforward: peak oil is the top of an oil field's bell curve of production, after which demand can rise all it wants, but supply inevitably falls. Throwing more technology at the problem, as the United States has done, just runs the field dry sooner.

Many geologists believe the world hit peak in 2005, and the results are catching up with us—oil prices rose more than fivefold from 1999 to 2007, then more than doubled in the last year. If oil prices increase over the next five years as much as they have in the last five—all else being equal—we will see gas prices of \$12.62 per gallon. If the price spike of the past year continues in a straight line, a gallon will be \$36 in 2013.

To understand the global movement, look around for a moment. Your computer keyboard, pen, food wrappers, nylon clothes, cold capsules, and a thousand other common items are made of plastic, which is made from oil. The machines that produced these items ran

on oil. They were transported from factories, often across the world, in ships and planes that run on oil. Many of the ingredients in your last meal were grown thousands of miles away, sprayed with fossil-fuel fertilizers, harvested with oil-powered tractors, and transported in oil-powered trucks, ships, and planes to the supermarket, where you drove your oil-powered car to buy them.

Our lives would be far less petroleum dependent if we had listened to geologist M. King Hubbert in 1956, when he unveiled his peak-oil theory to a Texas convention of oilmen. He laid out the basic curve of oilfield production and, based on the sum of its fields, predicted the U.S. would hit peak around 1970.

Hubbert was mocked for the rest of his life, but the U.S. did peak around 1970, the Middle East became the world's energy lifeline, and American foreign policy would never be the same.

Except for a brief flurry of hand-wringing during the oil shocks of the 1970s, the media ignored the subject for five decades—one of the few thoughtful articles on peak oil appeared in 1976,

not in *Time* or *Life* but in the Wisconsin angler's magazine *Fishing Facts*. Hubbert, meanwhile, expanded his research to the world and predicted a global peak around 2000. He was a little early—the earlier oil shocks slowed escalating demand—but not by much. It was not until the 1990s, shortly after Hubbert's death, that a few retiring petroleum geologists took up his cause and set the movement rolling across the young Internet.

PEAK OIL WILL PROBABLY NOT BE A CRASH, A MOMENT WHEN EVERYTHING FALLS APART, BUT A SERIES OF SMALL BREAKDOWNS, PRICE HIKES, AND LOCAL CRISES.

Several years ago, peak oil was still the realm of a few prophets and their followers and was usually discussed only on fringe Internet sites dedicated to conspiracies and aliens. By early 2007, however, a Google News search yielded hundreds of items, not from the mainstream press but letters to small-town papers, civic-center speeches, and thoughtful essays that stampeded across the far plains of Outer Blogistan. In the past year, with peak oil making headlines and writers like James Howard Kunstler appearing on national talk shows, the movement has gone mainstream.

Peak-oil believers have multiplied like religious revivalists across America and the world, describing on their websites how they became, in the language of conversion, "peak oil aware." Still, the news coverage falls back on old stereotypes—environmentalist, survivalist, homesteader, and homeschooler—often dismissing peak oil, like most useful ideas, as an obsession of the far Left or far Right.

The simpler truth is that peak-oil converts are often young people reviving the personal habits and self-sufficient skills of their grandparents' generation, thinking seriously about their tap water,

transportation, income, food, heat, and electricity, and realizing how little would survive the end of fossil fuels. They anticipate that population trends, climate change, and other problems will compound the crisis, creating what Kunstler has called the Long Emergency. While others are preoccupied with the hot-button lifestyle issues of the moment, they are planting gardens, buying foreclosed farms, learning traditional crafts, taking crash courses in sur-

vival skills, and soberly preparing while silently counting down.

Describing the world they are preparing for, believers invoke a "crash" or "collapse," the usual driving-toward-a-cliff metaphors and images from apocalyptic movies. Some envision a sudden snap-back to an earlier era, in which we are Wild West pioneers (Kunstler's *World Made by Hand*), desert nomads (James Lovelock's *Revenge of Gaia*), or cavemen (Richard Duncan's "Olduvai Theory"). At worst, they say, America will see an "orgy of bloodletting," (Michael Ruppert), in which we will experience a "sad, tragic, pitiful, pathetic existence" (Kunstler) and "there may be some cannibalism" (Dmitri Orlov). Even calls to mass action to manage the crisis—Lovelock's "sustainable retreat" and Richard Heinberg's "powerdown"—fall back on the language of defeat.

These writers are national heroes for sounding the alarm before anyone believed them. They have often been right, and any solar-powered Mayberrys of 2100 should have statues of them in the town square. But their long-held note of dread is useful only to the extent that it inspires people to do something more practical. The world we create will

be, up to a point, whatever we were preparing for, and as we enter the opening years of the crisis, it is time we all take a deep breath and talk about what we realistically expect from the future.

A critical mass of Americans who believe in an imminent zombie apocalypse runs the risk of making the future more difficult than it need be. Just as a Depression-era panic could crash a bank that would not otherwise have failed, so a widespread belief in a violent and hopeless end could actually make Americans less likely to work together during the next outage or shortage.

In fact, peak oil will probably not be a crash, a moment when everything falls apart, but a series of small breakdowns, price hikes, and local crises. This creates a risk of complacency—see the usual frog-in-boiling-water metaphors—but it also gives us time to act, if we choose to.

People adapt quickly. If you had suggested in 2000 that the World Trade Center would be destroyed, or in 2004 that a major city would be wiped out by a hurricane, the public might have assumed the event would change everything. Those tragedies did indeed change everything for a few people and a few things for the rest of us, but generally life has gone on. The Long Emergency will be an era, not an event, and the challenge will be to see the larger trends as they unfold and to retool our habits and infrastructure, not to wait for major developments to "hit."

Americans can afford to trim down in many ways. Seventy percent of us are overweight, about a third of our food is thrown away uneaten, and we spend billions transporting food that we could grow a short walk from our houses. Much of our agribusiness energy is spent manufacturing processed foods and their packaging—Wheaties instead of wheat, vegetable soup mix instead of vegetables—that are less efficient and often less

healthy. The same goes for other arenas: about 7 percent of our electrical power is lost in transmission, and much of our heat goes out the window.

When breakdowns do happen, people are often more neighborly than Hollywood imagines. Recent blackouts in St. Louis and New York did not result in mass hysteria but in friends helping each other out. Even the stories about New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina mostly turned out to be urban legends.

The Long Emergency could look like the Victory Garden movement during World War II, when Americans responded to a national threat by turning backyards into gardens and freeing food production for the troops. Within a couple of years, such gardens were producing almost half of Americans' vegetables. Contrary to popular myth, the movement was not a big-government initiative—the Roosevelt administration discouraged the effort at first, unsuccessfully, until it joined in and turned the White House lawn into crops. Similarly, Americans formed scrap and rubber drives and practiced emergency drills.

The same habits that helped us through that crisis—recycling, thrift, gardening—will help with this one. They made Americans healthier as well, for a time anyway: a now forgotten 1977 Congressional panel observed that heart attacks and strokes went down in the war years, even with the stresses of war and a demographic shift toward the elderly, because of an improved diet. Crime, depression, and suicide dropped dramatically when the war began, as often happens during a crisis.

While peak-oil literature often considers the world to be at the end of a 200-year industrial era, it is only in the last few decades that we have truly binged. By some estimates, the world has used as much oil in the last 25 years as in the entire previous century. Restoring a low-energy world, for many Americans,

Someone forged a letter, apparently at the request of Scooter Libby in Vice President Dick Cheney's office, but whodunit is far from clear. In his new book *The Way of the World*, Ron Suskind alleges that in the fall of 2003, after it became clear that there had been no *casus belli* for invading Iraq, the CIA was tasked with creating an incriminating handwritten letter. Dated July 2001, it was ostensibly written by Iraqi intelligence chief Tahir Jalil Habbush to Saddam, linking 9/11 hijacker Mohammed Atta to the Iraqi president. The letter surfaced in Baghdad in December 2003, was picked up by the *Sunday Telegraph*, and was initially accepted by much of the media as authentic.

As the sycophantic George Tenet was CIA director at the time, the Agency would almost certainly have complied with such a request, even though it is illegal for CIA to generate disinformation that might be picked up in the U.S. media. But two senior Agency officers identified as having carried out the deception on Tenet's orders—John Maguire and Robert Richer—denied Suskind's account. Tenet calls it "a complete fabrication."

Other intelligence sources also deny that the Agency produced the letter, though it might have been approached to do so. Tenet probably would not have undermined his own credibility by preparing such a document at the same time he was insisting publicly that there was no connection between Saddam and al-Qaeda. Also, if Cheney was behind the forgery, as my sources say, his hatred of the "disloyal" Agency would have disinclined him to trust it with such a sensitive assignment.

Rather, my sources indicate that the forgery was carried out by Doug Feith's Office of Special Plans. Unlike CIA, the Pentagon has no rules against the production of false information to mislead the public, and Feith's office seemed to specialize in such activity. OSP's involvement with Italian intelligence and possibly with the forgery of the Niger yellowcake uranium documents is well established, and it is certainly curious that the Niger story should resurface in the Habbush letter. OSP also leaked classified documents to *The Weekly Standard* to "prove" the link between Saddam and al-Qaeda, a theme revisited in the forged letter. Finally, the letter was reported by the *Sunday Telegraph*, a newspaper then owned by Conrad Black, an enthusiastic supporter of the Iraq War who had close ties to leading neoconservatives. His media empire has never been linked to placements by U.S. intelligence.

To confirm his account, Suskind released partial transcripts of his interviews with Richer; they suggested that Richer and Maguire knew about the letter but might not have ordered it written. At one point, Richer appears to quote Tenet saying, "Okay, we gotta do this, but make it go away." Richer claims, "we passed it on ... into the organization" and then appears to quote himself as saying, "This is unbelievable. This is just like all the other garbage we get about ... I mean Mohammad Atta and his links to al-Qaeda."

Critics have noted that Suskind's account of a letter written on White House stationery ordering the deception is implausible, as no one would have committed such a request to paper. But as the forgery was completely illegal, which Tenet would have known, he might have insisted on a document from the administration authorizing the operation.

The forger may never be identified, but that is less important than the revelation that the White House apparently ordered an illegal disinformation operation to falsify evidence of Iraqi ties to al-Qaeda.

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would not mean going back two centuries.

Take one of the more pessimistic projections of the future, from the Association for the Study of Peak Oil, and assume that by 2030 the world will have only two-thirds as much energy per person. Little breakdowns can feed on each other, so crudely double that estimate. Say that, for some reason, solar power, wind turbines, nuclear plants, tidal power, hydroelectric dams, bio-fuels, and new technologies never take off. Say that Americans make only a third as much money, cut driving by two-thirds. Assume that extended families have to move in together to conserve resources and that we must cut our flying by 98 percent.

Many would consider that a fairly clear picture of collapse. But we have been there before, and recently. Those are the statistics of the 1950s—not remembered as a big time for cannibalism.

PEAK OIL COULD BRING A **REVIVAL OF SMALL-TOWN AMERICA**, LOCAL FARMING, SMALL BUSINESSES, AND AN **ECONOMY THAT CENTERS AROUND MAIN STREET**.

The world in 1950 used 10 million barrels of oil a day instead of our 85 million, and only a third of that increase is due to population growth. The rest is just us—and it is mostly us in the West—driving, flying, buying, consuming, and discarding more in a month than our grandparents did in a year. The popular image of the '50s as an age of conspicuous consumption, suburban sprawl, and TV dinners misses the point. Those things were newsworthy then because they were new and unusual. Their equivalents today have so insinuated themselves into our lives that we accept them as natural, like omnipresent casinos or television violence.

The golden image of the '50s is not just nostalgia. In his 2000 book, *Bowling*

Alone, sociologist Robert Putnam showed that all habits of community—voting, volunteering, PTA chapters, Elk and Kiwanis memberships, card games, family dinners, all the way to hitchhiking and sidewalk courtesies—peaked in the mid-20th century and have since steadily declined. Happiness, as defined by survey responses, peaked then as well and has plummeted even as our incomes tripled.

The tight bonds and sanguine outlook of young people in the '50s, Putnam believes, originated in their shared experience on the home front during World War II. Working together during a national crisis made them lifelong model citizens, who swelled rates of optimism and civic activism at every age as they passed, like a pig through a python, across a demographic lifetime. Today's sullen youth may not seem likely candidates for such a destiny, but neither did the Depression urchins who would later

plant Victory Gardens. Putnam blames the post-'60s decline chiefly on commuting, which has grown from almost nothing to as much as four hours a day, and television, which has supplanted human interaction as our entertainment. Both are likely to become less central in the decades ahead.

We usually imagine that tomorrow will escalate the trends of today: science fiction in the 1950s pictured a future even more nuclear-powered, futurists of the '60s and '70s anticipated a world ever more psychedelic, while those of the '80s and '90s foresaw one more broken and violent. It is possible, however, that today's traffic jams, cheap Chinese-made goods, endless Mideast wars, casual air travel, and fractured families

are not a taste of 21st century, but a brief era out of which we will pass.

We need a common vision that avoids post-apocalypse yarns as well as "Star Trek" fantasies in favor of something both realistic and hopeful. Handled right, peak oil could bring a revival of small-town America, local farming, small businesses, and an economy that centers around Main Street rather than Wall Street. It wouldn't require us suddenly to turn Amish. With solar, wind, and nuclear power, we can maintain the Internet, commuter rail, and other technologies and continue the global exchange of ideas.

So, for our new vision during this national crisis, I nominate "The Andy Griffith Show." No, really, I'm serious.

Many Americans hold up Mayberry as a symbol of everything they miss, but after watching episodes for the first time in 30 years recently on DVD, it seems to me an idealized, broadly comic picture of the society to which we might return. No one has much money, but extended family helps raise the kids, neighbors pass the hat around for each other, and the town functions just fine.

If Andy Griffith is too corny, pick your favorite portrayal of a simpler American life. It may not exactly map the future, but it is likely to be more accurate and hopeful than the images we've been given for generations and would be familiar, popular, and attainable. It would serve to remind us that just a few generations ago Americans lived, and often lived well, before everything was cheap and fast and thrown away. We, with far more wealth and power than they had, are capable of walking into the Long Emergency unafraid and with a plan. ■

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Obama's Summer Blues

Over 200,000 people gathered in Berlin to cheer one of the most featureless speeches of Barack Obama's campaign, but the Democratic candidate couldn't carry that

energy home with him. Even after his grand tour, Obama's poll numbers—both nationally and in key states—declined or remained unchanged. He consistently leads John McCain by 3-4 points, but the latest Pew survey shows that 48 percent of the public suffers from “Obama fatigue.” In this most Democratic of years, the Democratic candidate can't seem to break away.

Of course, he's still winning, and he's currently projected to improve on his predecessor's Electoral College tally by at least 45 votes. But no one is talking about a landslide. This does not have the markings of another 1932, when FDR racked up 472 electoral votes, or another 1952, when Eisenhower won 442. It more closely resembles 1976, when a relatively untested Democratic reformer eked out a narrow victory against a Republican saddled with a sluggish economy.

Obama has gone out of his way to raise expectations about the outcome of this election, claiming that it will not be another tied contest with both campaigns fighting over a few middle-of-the-road voters in a couple of battleground states. But that is exactly the direction in which the election is heading. There is little evidence that the two major political coalitions have changed so radically as to allow Obama to move far beyond Kerry and Gore levels of support.

One theory for his failure to catch on argues that despite having his life chronicled in greater detail than any previous nominee, Obama remains vaguely foreign, his identity—in David Brooks's

term—“elusive.” For all his bestselling introspection, Obama isn't relatable. Taking an alternate view, Karl Rove claims that the Obama campaign is nothing but biography, though that description applies much better to the ramshackle McCain effort with its nostalgia tours and sepia-toned ads.

Meanwhile, observers on the Left, such as Susan Estrich, have become increasingly nervous about Obama's slight polling advantage, recalling much larger Dukakis leads in the summer of 1988. Unwilling to address Obama's weaknesses, they instead operate on the presumption that Republicans should not be doing as well as they are. The fear that Obama cannot, in Bill Clinton's words, “close the deal”—a lingering dread in the last months of the primary season—may return and escalate into panic if Obama loses his lead after both parties hold their conventions.

Already, Democrats' confidence seems shaken. In the weeks following Obama's return, the McCain campaign put Obama on the defensive and threw some Democratic supporters into a paranoid frenzy about coded messages on race and religion. Obama claimed that Republican scare tactics included insinuations that he does not look like the presidents “on the dollar bills,” and liberal backers discerned racist messages and homages to Nazi propaganda in a vapid ad that attacked Obama's celebrity status. More recently, Amy Sullivan has argued that a spot mocking some of Obama's more pretentious rhet-

oric included subtle hints that he was the Antichrist. These claims are ridiculous, but they may offer a partial explanation for Obama's lackluster numbers: Americans don't want to elect someone whose supporters hysterically imagine racial and religious cues lurking behind every criticism of their man.

That doesn't mean they won't make him president. The narrow margin is much less telling than it was in, to use Estrich's example, 1988, when Dukakis built up (and lost) a 17-point lead. The expansion of political media and technology in the last two decades has allowed both presidential coalitions to remain more stable throughout the campaign, as supporters rely increasingly on media targeted narrowly to them. This ensures that the number of persuadable voters is much smaller than it once was, which means that neither candidate will ever build up a large lead.

That's not to say that Obama shouldn't be doing better—or that a different Democratic nominee wouldn't be. But the disconcerting fact is that after eight years of illegal warfare, rampant criminality, the authorization of torture, and numerous other executive abuses of power, the nominee of the party primarily responsible will probably still pull in 47-48 percent of the vote—and maybe more. Since the only ones who have so far been blamed for the administration's wrongdoing have been the president's enablers in Congress, the electorate is preparing to toss them from their relatively powerless legislative perches. Meanwhile, we may end up rewarding one of the major accomplices of this administration's crimes with the executive power whose abuse he did so little to challenge. ■

Arts & Letters

FILM

[*Brideshead Revisited*]

Good Film, Bad Waugh

By Steve Sailer

NO AMERICAN did more to resuscitate Evelyn Waugh's reputation than the late William F. Buckley. By Waugh's death in 1966, the reactionary Catholic novelist's standing had fallen almost as low as Jay McInerney's has today, yet Buckley's devotion introduced Waugh to a new generation. For Waugh's 1982 apotheosis, the monumental 13-episode "*Brideshead Revisited*" miniseries, Buckley was rightly hired to host the show on PBS.

The news that the recent movie adaptation of *Brideshead*, Waugh's magenta-hued 1945 saga about a decadent Catholic noble family, would star the English actor Matthew Goode was intriguing. Goode, who played an amusing aristocrat in Woody Allen's "*Match Point*," resembles a young Buckley, especially in his express-elevator eyebrows. His patrician magnetism made him a natural to play Sebastian Flyte, the charming toff who beguiles Charles Ryder, an ambitious bourgeois aesthete, when they meet at Oxford in 1923.

After Sebastian drinks himself into a monastery, Ryder's ingenuous "romantic friendship" with Sebastian is followed by a mature love affair with Sebastian's sister Julia. She's unhappily married to the crass politician Rex Mottram, whom Waugh modeled on Winston Churchill's right-hand man, Brendan Bracken. Rex is willing to give her a divorce, but Julia's

vestigial Catholicism raises qualms in her about remarriage.

Unfortunately, the new "*Brideshead Revisited*" casts Goode as Charles, the reticent interloper dazed by the refinement of the Flyte family and their stately home Brideshead—played once again by the stupendous Castle Howard in North Yorkshire—leaving Goode few occasions to deploy his Buckleysque facial gymnastics.

Despite that missed opportunity, this "*Brideshead Revisited*" is a perfectly competent film for grown-ups, superior to last year's similar exercise in English upper-crust period porn, the Best Picture nominee "*Atonement*."

"*Atonement*" invited us to indulge in modern metasnobbery, to tut-tut publicly about the horrors of the English class system while privately wallowing in the visual splendor it created. In contrast, Waugh was an old-fashioned snob, whose only objection to class was that he wasn't born into the very highest one.

While the 2008 "*Brideshead Revisited*" is certainly tasteful and efficient, those are just about the last words you'd associate with Waugh's grand but sprawling bestseller, half-masterpiece, half-embarrassment. Waugh had achieved near-perfection in *Scoop*, his 1938 satirical novel. In the more melodramatic *Brideshead*, however, he wore his heart on his sleeve ("The languor of Youth—how unique and quintessential it is! How quickly, how irrecoverably, lost!"), revealing the easily bruised soul over which he had grown his carapace of malicious wit.

The new "*Brideshead*" is thus a good film but not good Waugh. That's hardly surprising. Despite the enormous sums Hollywood invests in major novels by major novelists—in 1946, MGM paid Waugh \$140,000 for *Brideshead*, but never made the film—the books

inevitably fail to translate fully to the screen. There's simply too much there.

It's unfortunate for the movies that the short story has almost died as an art form. As John Huston's 1975 adaptation of Kipling's short story "*The Man Who Would Be King*" demonstrated, it's often more satisfying for all concerned to expand a 20-page tale than to eviscerate a 350-page novel.

In contrast, the old miniseries certainly did Waugh justice by running an outlandish 659 minutes. That's too long; I endured the first two hours, then gave up due to the glacial pacing. As superb as the acting was, the miniseries was a relic from the "*Shogun*" era, before the universality of remote controls sapped audiences' patience. (Perhaps the producers of the new film should have simply edited the 11-hour classic version down to 135 minutes.)

The modest attempts to modernize this 2008 "*Brideshead*" just sap the delirious momentum of the original. For example, the screenwriters concoct a scene in which Rex sells Julia to Charles in return for two paintings, as if she's his possession, causing Julia to flare up with feminist resentment. In the book, though, Julia despises Rex not because he's an antiquated patriarch, but because he's a blasé modern husband untroubled by infidelity.

Co-screenwriter Andrew Davies, age 71, has implied that he felt ill at ease over *Brideshead*'s Catholicism, with all that archaic distaste for divorce. Why shouldn't Julia marry Charles once they've both shed their spouses? Yet attitudes have changed once again, necessitating that the new film delete Charles's two children by his first wife to keep the adulterer a sympathetic character for today's younger audiences. ■

Rated PG-13 for some sexual content.

BOOKS

[*The Selected Essays of Gore Vidal, Jay Parini, ed.*
Doubleday, 458 pages]

The Last Republican

By Bill Kauffman

"GORE VIDAL is America's premier man of letters," says Jay Parini in his introduction to *The Selected Essays of Gore Vidal*, and if after reading Vidal on William Dean Howells, Tennessee Williams, various dead Kennedys, and "American sissy" Theodore Roosevelt the reader denies it—well, hie on back to the MFA prison.

The *Selected Essays* were written over the course of a half-century (1953-2004), or almost one-quarter of the lifespan of the Republic that is Vidal's primary subject—though it might more accurately be said that Vidal has been a contumacious patriot of the Old Republic for nigh the entirety of the post-Republic era. As such, he is a man out of time in the United States of Amnesia, as he calls his native and beloved land.

What a pleasure these essays are. One imagines Gore Vidal at his writing desk, hint of a smile creasing his mouth as he mints Saint-Gaudens gold-piece witticisms with Lincoln-penny frequency. Here he is on Ohio's greatest novelist: "For a writer, Howells himself was more than usually a dedicated hypochondriac whose adolescence was shadowed by the certainty that he had contracted rabies which would surface in time to kill him at sixteen. Like most serious hypochondriacs, he enjoyed full rude health until he was eighty."

"It should be noted that Vidal is conservative in many respects," writes Parini. "He stands behind individual choice, the limitation of executive

power, and preservation of the environment. Like his grandfather, he dislikes the empire. ... He would return us, if possible, to the pure republicanism of early America."

That grandfather, the blind Sen. Thomas P. Gore (D-Okla.), was a first-rate populist foe of war and FDR. He was a peace Democrat, which is why no one has ever heard of him. Vidal's education owed more to home than academy, as he read aloud to the senator, from whom he inherited an isolationist opposition to foreign wars, a populist suspicion of concentrated capital, a free-thinker's hatred of cant, and a patriot's detestation of empire.

Like Mencken, Ray Bradbury, Hemingway, and other original Americans, Vidal escaped a college sentence. He is the scourge of sciolism, of credentialed arrogance. As he writes of his friend's mistreatment while speaking to snotty drama students at Yale: "Any student who has read Sophocles in translation is, demonstrably, superior to Tennessee Williams in the unruly flesh."

The foaming and thoroughly ideologized haters of Vidal are simply incapable of writing prose anywhere near as tautly conversational, as confidently but never pedantically erudite, as amaranthine as the master. Vidal commits an unforgivable sin in our age of the national hall monitor: humor. Is it any wonder they hate him? Vidal inevitably gets the best of the carpers in any exchange because he is funny and they are not. Or in his words, "I responded to my critics with characteristic sweetness, turning the other fist as is my wont."

His best essays are often sympathetic readings of such forgotten or undervalued American writers as the Ohio (Ohio again!)-bred satirist Dawn Powell (who "always knows how much salt a wound requires"); *Tarzan* creator Edgar Rice Burroughs (a talented action writer who was "innocent of literature" but as a drifter, cowboy, gold miner, and railroad cop was, like Vidal, "perfectly in the old-American grain"); and Tennessee Williams, "the Glorious Bird," whose work Vidal assesses with an affection-

ately critical eye. The personal anecdote he deploys expertly. Of a dinner with Williams and his magnificently teragant mother:

Tennessee clears his throat again. 'Mother, eat your shrimp.'

'Why,' counters Miss Edwina, 'do you keep making that funny sound in your throat?'

'Because, Mother, when you destroy someone's life you must expect certain nervous disabilities.'

One of my favorite Vidal essays is his appreciation of William Dean Howells, who brought Ohio into the *Atlantic* and championed the new realists and regionalists of the late Gilded Age. He is a man after Vidal's own heart: "Since Howells had left school at fifteen he had been able to become very learned indeed."

Howells was barely of shaving age when he wrote a campaign biography of Lincoln. Precocious—"an ambitious but not insane poet"—he obtained a consulate in Venice thanks to his connection with Salmon P. Chase, the Free Soil Buckeye and constitutionalist who, as Lincoln's secretary of the Treasury and later chief justice of the Supreme Court, is one of those men like Robert A. Taft and Bob LaFollette who really ought to have been president.

Howells later wrote another campaign biography, this time of Rather-fraud Hayes, for whom the 1876 election was stolen from Samuel Tilden, the pornography connoisseur known in real-estate circles as "The Great Fore-closer." But Howells's legacy was one of the truly great American novels, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885). Again, Vidal's subject is vivified through a close reading of the novels and perfectly placed anecdotes. I liked Mark Twain's line about Elinor, Howells's wife, entering a room: "dialogue ceased and monologue inherited its assets and continued business at the old stand."

There is, I suppose, a sense in which a eulogist often is singing a song of himself. We laud in others what we perceive, or hope for, in ourselves. Vidal says of

Howells that he “wrote a half-dozen of the Republic’s best novels. He was learned, witty, and generous.” Just so with the eulogist.

Likewise, Vidal is also fond of his kindred spirit Edmund Wilson, another proprietary patriot. The country was founded by such as Vidal and Wilson, their people shaped it, and they will not let it go without a fight, which is why in its collapse they turned withering fire upon its enemies. Wilson and Vidal were brave, though it was really a sense of patriotic duty, I think, that impelled their lonely stands against the empire that was erasing their ancestral Republic.

Wilson—“the most interesting and the most important” critic of mid-century—was a polymathic old American autodidact (Princeton years excluded) of the Vidal school: “When he died, at seventy-seven, he was busy stuffing his head with irregular Hungarian verbs.” Vidal appreciates Wilson in his late autumn, when he really hit his stride with *Patriotic Gore* (whose introduction, comparing Lincoln to Lenin and Bismarck, got the energetic Bunny expelled from the warren), *The Cold War and the Income Tax*, *Upstate*, and *Apologies to the Iroquois*.

Like Wilson, Vidal regards federal taxes as confiscatory and the fuel by which an anti-American war machine is run. “Why,” he asks in his 1972 essay “Homage to Daniel Shays,”

do we allow our governors to take so much of our money and spend it in ways that not only fail to benefit us but do great damage to others as we prosecute undeclared wars—which even our brainwashed majority has come to see are a bad proposition because of the cost of maintaining a vast military machine, not to mention a permanent draft of young men (an Un-American activity if there ever was one) in what is supposed to be peacetime? Whether he knows it or not, the middle-income American is taxed as though he were living in a socialist society.

In 1951, most self-described “conservatives” would have nodded their heads in agreement with this observation. But that was before the “conservative movement” sacrificed hearth, home, peace, liberty, and tenderness on the block to wars without end and tanks with 501(c)(3) treads.

Vidal dislikes Wilson’s clinical diaristic record of his sexual irruptions. “In literature, sexual revelation is a matter of tact and occasion,” writes Vidal, who,

HE IS VERY MUCH IN THE **AMERICAN LIBERTARIAN VEIN**, THOUGH HIS CONVICTION THAT “**MONOTHEISM IS THE GREATEST DISASTER EVER TO BEFALL THE HUMAN RACE**” IS UNLIKELY TO APPEAL TO MANY CONSERVATIVE READERS.

contrary to the idiotic canard that he is a “gay writer,” has written about his own sex life sparingly. He is impatient with those modern writers who, once they “could put sex into the novel, proceeded to leave out almost everything else.” He is what he calls a same-sexer, though where sex intercrops with politics he is libertarian, demanding only that the state leave adults alone to pursue whatever consensual conjugations they please.

He disdains the hatchet, though no one levels the critical boom quite as crushingly, in a single sentence, as Gore Vidal. Of John Updike’s memoir *Self-Consciousness* (1989): “Dental problems occupy many fascinating pages.” Of Herman Wouk’s *The Caine Mutiny* (1951): “from Queequeg to Queeg, or the decline of American narrative.” Reviewing Donald Barthelme’s *Guilty Pleasures* (1974): “This writer cannot stop making sentences. I have stopped reading a lot of them.” (This is in the midst of a hilarious essay based on voluntary exposure to the academy-bound American metafictionists, who provide “the sense of suffocation one experiences reading so much bad writing.”)

The inevitable Arthur Schlesinger, ineligible receiver in those Kennedy touch football games, is noticed and dismissed: “*A Thousand Days* is the best

political novel since *Coningsby*.” Unlike “Professor Pendulum,” who fretted over the imperial presidency only when Richard Nixon darkened the White House, Vidal, as a good Anti-Federalist, views the president, whether Democrat or Republican, as “a dictator who can only be replaced either in the quadrennial election by a clone or through his own incompetency.” Executive orders, executive agreements, executive privileges: he would scrap them all. He

admires the Swiss cantonal system and would borrow from it to revive our torpid federalism. He favors national referenda, a pet cause of his grandfather, one of the first proponents of the war referendum that later took shape as the Ludlow Amendment. He would “stop all military aid to the Middle East,” repeal “every prohibition against the sale and use of drugs,” and “withdraw from NATO.”

He is very much in the American libertarian vein, though his conviction that “monotheism is the greatest disaster ever to befall the human race” is unlikely to appeal to many conservative readers. He is a Bill of Rights stalwart, however, who takes the now wildly unfashionable view that kooks and outcasts have liberties, too. These include the Branch Davidians, who “were living peaceably in their own compound at Waco, Texas, until an FBI SWAT team ... killed eighty-two of them.” As early as 1953 he spoke of “these last days before the sure if temporary victory of that authoritarian society which, thanks to science, now has every weapon with which to make even the most inspired lover of freedom conform to the official madness.”

He patriotically detests the National Security State, which hijacked the country circa 1950 and has not given up the

controls yet. In the late 1980s, Vidal called for a “neo-Clayite” candidate to campaign on internal improvements and avoidance of foreign quarrels. I wish he had run the race himself. But by 1992, three such men were running: Ross Perot, Jerry Brown, and Pat Buchanan, in the most interesting political year of the post-Republic era. Each, in his particular way, appealed to heirs and offshoots of the old Thomas P. Gore/Bob LaFollette/America First populist tradition. Vidal sensed a “potentially major constituency—those who now believe that it was a mistake to have wasted, since 1950, most of the government’s revenues on war.” He scorned Buchanan’s Catholic understanding of sexuality but conceded that “he is a reactionary in the good sense—reacting against the empire in favor of the old Republic, which he mistakenly thinks was Christian.”

Every now and again the reader is reminded that Vidal’s bloodlines run south. He chides G. William Domhoff, who is “given to easy liberal epithets like ‘Godforsaken Mississippi’” even though “except on the subject of race, the proud folk down there are populist to the core.” So is Vidal. He is with Shays, with Bryan, with the America Firsters. He envisages an alliance of the “not-so-poor” and the poor and predicts that the “politician who can forge that alliance will find himself, at best, the maker of a new society; at worst, in a hole at Arlington.”

While his subject has been America and the push-pull debate over its empire, Vidal rejects novels “which attempt to change statutes or moral attitudes” as “not literature at all” but arid propaganda. Thus he is capable of the greatest fictive rendering of Abraham Lincoln in all of American literature—the novel *Lincoln* (1984)—despite being largely out of sympathy with Lincoln’s politics. For Vidal desires the president to be cut down to constitutional size, and Lincoln, he writes, “levied taxes and made war; took unappropriated money from the Treasury; suspended habeas corpus.”

Yet Lincoln, that most confounding of presidents, was also thoughtful, wise, and an erstwhile critic of expansion. His old law partner Billy Herndon claimed that Abe never read a book straight through, but at least he did not make fun of book-writers. The contrast with the current war-maker in the White House reflects well on the 19th century, or poorly on us.

And so I must end with a lovely and poignant passage from Vidal’s Howells essay. It is the kind of vignette that would appeal only to a man with a country:

For some years I have been haunted by a story of Howells and that most civilized of all our presidents, James A. Garfield. In the early 1870s Howells and his father paid a visit to Garfield. As they sat on Garfield’s veranda, young Howells began to talk about poetry and about the poets that he had met in Boston and New York. Suddenly, Garfield told him to stop. Then Garfield went to the edge of the veranda and shouted to his Ohio neighbors, ‘Come over here! He’s telling about Holmes, and Longfellow, and Lowell, and Whittier!’ So the neighbors gathered around in the dusk; then Garfield said to Howells, ‘Now go on.’

Today we take it for granted that no living president will ever have heard the name of any living poet. This is not, necessarily, an unbearable loss. But it is unbearable to have lost those Ohio neighbors who actually read books of poetry and wanted to know about the poets.

Thus speaks Gore Vidal, American patriot. ■

Bill Kauffman’s most recent book is Ain’t My America. His Forgotten Founder/Drunken Prophet: The Life of Luther Martin is due from ISI Books in September. His TAC column will also launch that month.

[*The Quest for Shakespeare*, Joseph Pearce, Ignatius, 216 pages]

Shakespeare for the Masses

By Clare Asquith

“THE GREATEST ADVANTAGE of Shakespeare studies,” grumbles one scholar, “seems to be that questions may be asked over and over again, and that almost nobody pays attention to the answers.” Evidence that much Shakespeare scholarship is indeed a dialogue of the deaf may be found in the current controversy over Shakespeare’s religion, an arena in which identical historical material is wheeled out repeatedly by every side as conclusive proof of its own argument and just as repeatedly ignored.

Most contemporary biographers opt for a secular Shakespeare whose standpoint was that of an enlightened Renaissance humanist detached from the religious disputes of his day. Joseph Pearce takes the opposing view. He cites evidence that Shakespeare remained a Catholic throughout his life, and Pearce fights his unpopular corner with the vigor of one of his earlier biographical subjects, G.K. Chesterton: “It does beggar belief,” he exclaims, “that writers as accomplished as [Peter] Ackroyd and [Anthony] Holden can write full-length biographies of Shakespeare without seeing the Catholic truth that is literally and literarily staring them in the face.”

For Pearce, the facts speak for themselves. But the secularists also claim a monopoly on the facts. The problem is that the facts themselves are notoriously slippery. Did Shakespeare’s father, John, retire from civic life because of debt or because of his Catholicism? Is the “testament” confirming his Catholicism genuine or a crafty fake? Did his famous son avoid paying taxes out of stinginess or because of his religion? Did Shakespeare purchase New Place in Stratford to assist its bankrupted recusant owners, or was it

simply an opportunist investment? How reliable is the famous pronouncement by a 17th-century Anglican clergyman that Shakespeare “died a Papist”?

Writing and arguing with admirable clarity, Pearce sets out to correct what he sees as the skewed historical perspective that makes questions like these so problematic. He makes no claims to original research. His book highlights instead the neglected work of biographers who have over the past century argued for Shakespeare’s Catholicism, in particular Peter Milward, Mutschmann and Wentersdorf, Hugh Ross Williamson, and Ian Wilson. Wherever possible Pearce calls on the recent work of the “spotlessly secular” Michael Wood to confirm his findings.

In spite of his own evident conviction, Pearce’s approach is judicious. Weighing the pros and cons of a favorite Catholic theory that Shakespeare travelled with the Jesuit martyr Edmund Campion to work as a tutor at Hoghton Tower in Lancashire, he rightly concludes that in the

end “we cannot know, for certain, one way or the other.” But he makes a persuasive case for the reassessment of other familiar landmarks in Shakespeare’s life.

Secularist biographers fail to mention the significance of John Shakespeare’s refusal to pay a government levy in the 1580s. This tax was imposed specifically on Catholic recusants as a punitive contribution to Elizabeth’s campaigns against foreign Catholic threats; John Shakespeare’s fellow defaulters were all Catholic.

Pearce also has an intriguing take on the Somerville case. John Somerville, a Catholic neighbor and relative of the Shakespeares, died in prison in 1583 after threatening to kill the queen. One of the commissioners tasked with rooting out Catholic sympathizers in the vicious reprisals that followed was the powerful Thomas Lucy, traditionally the man who harassed the young Shakespeare, eventually driving him out of Warwickshire for poaching his deer. Pearce argues that the tale is a cover-up for the unpalatable truth: Shakespeare’s family were among those “kin to all touched” whom Lucy was instructed to arrest and interrogate on suspicion of Catholic sedition.

In similar fashion, Pearce sharpens the focus on Shakespeare’s retirement purchase of the Blackfriars Gatehouse in London, making clear that this costly acquisition was a known “safe house” for Catholics both before and after Shakespeare’s investment. The Catholic who leased the building was, in the words of Ian Wilson, “not so much Shakespeare’s tenant as his appointed guardian of one of London’s best places of refuge for Catholic priests.”

Pearce capitalizes boldly on moments like these, using the final plea in Shakespeare’s last completed play—“And my ending is despair / Unless I be relieved by prayer”—to support his conclusion that the Gatehouse was Shakespeare’s contribution to the Catholic resistance, as well as “a spiritual investment” in a place where he knew Masses would be said for him.

My single criticism of a book that claims to be “dealing solely with the facts” is that Pearce is less certain of his facts than biographers like Wood or Honan. Thomas Lodge’s *Rosalynde* is not a play; there is no evidence that Cardinal Allen taught at Stratford Grammar School; it was not Mass in Southampton’s house, but his own, that led to Swithin Wells’s execution outside his front door. But these are minor niggles in a book that is otherwise a powerfully argued recapitulation of the current historical evidence for Shakespeare’s Catholicism.

Pearce’s next book will deal with the textual evidence. This area is potentially the most convincing, and a brilliant concluding essay on “King Lear” gives a tantalizing foretaste of his approach. His reading of Sonnet 23, however, “Like an imperfect actor on the stage,” omits the typically Shakespearean twist to this confession of covert Catholicism. It is not a straightforward tribute to Henry VIII’s chancellor, Thomas More—“More than that tongue that more hath more express’d”—who died for resisting the English Protestant Reformation. It is a delicately ironic plea to the discerning reader to notice that in one sense Shakespeare the reluctant conformist is superior to the courageous More. Cowardice and frustration have driven him to plead the Catholic cause with more “eloquence” than More, the great advocate, ever did. In Shakespeare the persecution has created, if not a great saint, at least a fervent apologist.

On the evidence of this biography, Joseph Pearce is precisely the kind of reader the sonnet addresses—outstandingly well equipped to “hear with eyes” and to interpret clearly to modern readers the context and the gist of what “silent love has writ.” The sequel could mark a genuine landmark in Shakespeare studies, and might for once make the secularist opposition sit up and listen. ■

Clare Asquith writes from Somerset, England. She is author of Shadowplay: The Hidden Beliefs and Coded Politics of William Shakespeare.

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[*Forgotten Continent: The Battle for Latin America's Soul*, Michael Reid, Yale University Press, 315 pages]

From Bolivar to Chavez

By Michael Ard

FEW FIGURES expressed Latin America's tragic sense of life better than its liberator, Simon Bolivar. Disillusioned by his failure to unite the former Spanish colonies, Bolivar in his final days lamented that those who serve revolution in these lands "plow the seas."

That has proved a useful metaphor for most Latin America watchers, who tend to linger on intractable problems—corruption, economic blunders, instability, poverty, and racism. Many books, such as Eduardo Galeano's *The Open Veins of Latin America*, have encouraged Latinos to blame foreigners, above all the United States, for the continent's chronic failures.

Michael Reid, the Americas editor of the *Economist*, sees things differently. In his highly readable and sweeping *Forgotten Continent: The Battle for Latin America's Soul*, he argues that the region, in spite of its persistent poverty and inequity, has achieved a quiet revolution of sound and lasting reform. Marxist insurgencies, military dictatorships, and economic breakdowns still linger, but they are on the wane.

If true, Reid's assessment is good news for the United States. Richard Nixon said, "People don't give a damn about Latin America now"—and the same words could have been repeated after 9/11—but most Americans recognize the shortsightedness of such a view. Trouble south of the border invariably ends up on our doorstep.

Reid emphasizes that the importance of Latin America extends far beyond its effect on the United States: its welfare constitutes a vital element in the forward march of the global market. For

him, Latin America "has become one of the world's most important and testing laboratories for the viability of democratic capitalism as a global project."

Economic progress in the region, he contends, has disproved theories about dependency, or the imperial legacy of Portugal and Spain, that used to be the standard academic explanations for Latin backwardness. Most Latin American countries now accept the so-called "Washington Consensus," a menu of neoliberal reforms directed by economists during the 1980s. And though neoliberalism has been discredited in name, policies of fiscal responsibility, privatization, inflation fighting, and lower tariffs have taken root across Central and South America.

Some key political leaders converted to the new creed. Brazilian President Henrique Cardoso, for one, abandoned ideas that blamed the region's problems on predatory foreign capitalism and led his country's privatization and currency-reform efforts. Even Chile's socialist government has embraced neoliberalism, and the Andean nation is now poised to join the ranks of developed nations with successful export-led growth models.

Producers throughout Latin America have recently increased the value of their core industries. Brazil's investment in biotechnological research and development, for example, has turned the country into a leader in plant-based fuels. Its sugar-derived ethanol is far more efficient and sustainable than the U.S.'s corn-derived variety.

Latin American nations are improving their human capital, too, training their people to compete in the global market. Mexican businessmen developed the Monterrey Institute of Technology, with branches all over the country linked to local business needs. This educational advance stands in pleasing contrast to the nation's state-run universities, which for years were geared to churning out unemployable liberal arts majors.

The embrace of market ideas in Latin America, Reid observes, came from the most improbable sources. General

Pinochet, after his coup in 1973, started Chile on the road to economic reform. And in Mexico, the authoritarian and protectionist Institutional Revolutionary Party began liberalizing its economy to recover from the 1980s debt crisis. Several other nations followed suit, instituting central bank independence and relaxing trade restrictions. Some hope to negotiate their own NAFTA agreements with the United States. Today, Reid argues, the growth of internal capital markets has lessened the need for external lending, and therefore developing regions are more secure against downturns in world financial markets.

It is clear, however, that modernization in Latin America has been far from painless. Neoliberal reforms prompted fierce populist backlashes in several countries, largely because privatization was seen as fueling corruption. Nevertheless, Reid's overall view that democratic capitalism has reduced instability and poverty is convincing.

Furthermore, after years of political turmoil, democracy is consolidating in the region. Thirty years ago, nearly all governments in Latin America were dictatorships. Now, nearly all except Cuba run on a system of electoral representation. Tellingly, the continent's last successful coup occurred in 1980 in troubled Bolivia. As recent polling demonstrates, an overwhelming majority of Latin Americans prefer democracy as a form of government. Perhaps those who miss the autocrats the most are Latin American writers, who made a living analyzing the lives of their leaders.

The path to democracy was long and tortuous, however, because, unlike the United States, Latin America was not "born free" and therefore had to overcome powerful forces defending ancient privileges and the status quo. As Reid notes, governments established after independence relied not on the rule of law "but on the rule of discretion."

Mexico provides a dramatic example. For decades its single-party dictatorship took "the rule of discretion" to new depths, making the country a world

leader in electoral fraud techniques. Reform, however, began under President Carlos Salinas (1988-94), and today Mexico's Federal Electoral Institute stands as a model for other developing democracies. Mexico in 2006 endured a presidential election decided by a tortilla-thin margin, but the institute ably managed the outcome, and moves by the challenger to destabilize the political system soon faded.

DESPITE HIS **DESPOTIC TENDENCIES**, CHAVEZ HAS YET TO OVERCOME VENEZUELA'S INSTINCTIVE PREFERENCE FOR **POLITICAL FREEDOM**.

These political advances have paid dividends. Today, President Felipe Calderon is outdoing his predecessor Vicente Fox in advancing fiscal reform legislation by cobbling together support in Mexico's divided congress. Mexicans are demonstrating that democratic government can make real progress against hard problems.

Other regional democracies are maturing, too. Brazil has shaken off major political scandals and, under President Luis Ignacio "Lula" da Silva, looks like a consolidated government more responsive to its people. Colombia has survived many internal threats to its democratic system and under President Alvaro Uribe has begun to tackle its once seemingly intractable security problems.

Democracy, Reid explains, has forced many Latin American nations to come to grips with the plight of blacks and indigenous peoples. Brazil and other nations have large and vigorous indigenous movements pushing for more economic rights. Consequently, pressure from below has brought about a rise in social spending and innovative antipoverty programs in many countries. In recent years, "people of color" have made a political impact, with men such as Alejandro Toledo, Evo Morales, and Hugo Chavez coming to power.

Not all is right with Latin American democracy, however. The United Nations Development Program recently concluded that the region still falls short

in developing "a democracy of citizens." Efforts to democratize have sometimes backfired. Most nations complement their presidential system with congresses elected by proportional representation. Despite appearing more democratic, PR can lead to fragmented party systems and governmental gridlock. These problems have often tempted presidents to run roughshod over the legislative power.

In many areas, the establishment of legitimate political authority, a work in progress since Bolivar's era, remains elusive. The narcoguerrilla group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) controls large swaths of Colombian territory. Many cities, especially in Brazil, contain no-go zones for the police. And the police themselves often either prey on civilians or engage in vigilante justice. The Mexican army is today waging a bloody war against powerful drug-trafficking gangs, which have long held government authorities at bay.

Reid considers the greatest threat to democracy to be populism, as exemplified by Hugo Chavez, the president of Venezuela. While the danger from Fidel Castro now seems to be past, Chavez and his imitators represent a more formidable challenge. The desire for more authentic democracy in Latin America has opened the door to leaders who are able to combine authoritarian and socialist rule with mass appeal.

In some ways, Chavez stands as the exception that proves the rule. Reid argues that the Venezuelan president has moved more timidly than most observers expected given the power that he enjoys. Most of his populist programs simply intensify the efforts of past Venezuelan governments. Despite his despotic tendencies, Chavez has yet to overcome Venezuela's instinctive preference for political freedom. And

Chavez's influence on the continent seems limited. Other Latin leaders seem less committed to undermining civil liberties and defying the United States.

Reid, through his *Economist* lenses, sees the struggle in Latin America as one between "modernizers and reactionaries, democrats and authoritarians, privileged and excluded." But he must know that the reality is more complex. In Latin America, the "children of light" are often indistinguishable from the "children of darkness." Authoritarians like Pinochet opened the doors to economic reform; defenders of the excluded like Chavez run roughshod over democracy.

Forgotten Continent is often persuasive, and Reid recognizes the region still has a long way to go. But his optimism is perhaps unwarranted. After all, despite recent gains, the region's growth rate of 5.6 percent in 2007 trails other underdeveloped areas, including Africa. According to the 2008 Index of Economic Freedom, only Chile and El Salvador rank among the freest economies in the world; Argentina, Bolivia, Cuba, and Venezuela bring up the rear. Prosperity in Latin American countries depends in good part on the \$60 billion in annual remittances—a figure exceeding direct foreign investment—that immigrants send from abroad.

Too many Latin Americans still heed Bolivar's bitter judgment—and emigrate north. ■

Michael Ard, the author of An Eternal Struggle: How the National Action Party Transformed Mexican Politics, writes from Leesburg, Virginia.

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Scientism Fiction

While the advent of the sciences has been a mixed blessing, giving us dentistry on the one hand but also the automobile and electronic amplification of sound, its

philosophical consequences have been purely unfortunate. In particular, we have suffered the rise of scientism. This consists of mechanistic materialism applied beyond its reach. The sciences endeavor to understand things that are scientifically (i.e., materialistically) understandable. Scientism is the belief that everything is scientifically understandable. The success of the sciences in producing iPods is such that anything scientismists say is received with reverence. We now believe in pure pool-ball materialism, whether it makes sense or not.

Consider a little girl of three romping with a puppy in a field of summer flowers. (I have in mind a certain daughter in a certain field.) She is charmed by her puppy, the puppy by her, and both rush about in the joy that only the very new to the world can feel. Watching them, I would see, and probably you would see, sunlight and gladness and perhaps think that just maybe, though probably not, the world was a better place than we had thought.

A scientismist would not see these things. He would see child and doglet as chemical reactions, differing only in complexity from the fizzing of vinegar and baking soda. He can see nothing else. Prettiness, affection, delight in bouncing—these are not scientifically admissible. They have no physical definition and therefore cannot exist. If in some awkward and irritating sense they do have being, it is of a trivial order and best ignored. Those with real understanding focus on the wave equation.

Scientists, certainly the greats, do not have such tinker-toy minds. A Newton, seeing a little girl with her puppy, would see a little girl with her puppy. Large minds know their limitations and even welcome them: who but a hopeless drone, however bright, would want to live in a mindless, thumping, banging world ruled by subatomic pool balls in meaningless motion? But the scientismist needs a mechanical explanation for everything.

The which worketh not. There is more to a small girl and to a puppy than metabolic pathways and adenosine triphosphate produced by the citric-acid cycle in the mitochondrial cristae to fuel muscular contractions involving actin and myosin, thus inspiring linguistic horror in all about. There is more to a sunset, rolling way in molten dunes in some unfathomable desert, slowly burning out to purple and grey, than refractive indices and water vapor.

Explaining a puppy to a scientismist is like explaining an orchestra to the congenitally deaf. “Yes, I see. All these people are sawing away at things and blowing into other things and waving back and forth, but what is the point of it?” A deaf man can be very bright, but he cannot hear. A deaf man knows that he is deaf. A scientismist does not.

Like other approximately religious systems, scientism requires wanton disregard of the inconvenient. Consciousness, for example. It has no scientific definition. It cannot be instrumentally detected. (Is a brick conscious? How would you know?) Does consciousness interact with matter? It would seem so.

If I consciously will my hand to move, it does, and a cinderblock, falling on my foot, robustly affects my consciousness. Well, if consciousness affects the physical behavior of matter, would not physics take it into account? But how?

The usual response to these questions, as I have encountered it, is to pooh-pooh consciousness (“It’s just a metaphysical construct”) or to say that it evolved for some purpose or another. Since fossilized consciousness is rare, I do not see how one knows that it evolved at all, and I note that evolution does not contain purpose, though evolutionists generally do.

And, of course, the scientismo-mechanistic view falls completely apart when it bumps up against such difficult matters as right and wrong or, worse yet, Good and Evil. These lack physical definitions, as does consciousness, and so don’t exist.

I say to the scientismist, “I think I’ll burn your daughter at the stake tonight. Surely you can’t object? I’m merely substituting one set of chemical reactions for another.”

To which he will respond that he objects because an evolutionary instinct (physical definition, please?) makes him want (how does a purely physical system want things?) to pass on his genes via his daughter. Oh. “Then may I burn your post-menopausal wife instead, since she isn’t going to pass along any further genes?”

Behind all this convolution lies a profound unease with the mysteriousness of life and with the limits of human understanding. We overrate ourselves. Perhaps scientismists ought to say to themselves every night, “The brightest of a large number of hamsters is, when you get down to it, a hamster.” ■

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